

No One Takes My Life From Me

PART 10 - BETRAYAL

TEXT: JOHN 13:21-30 (ESV)



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November 23, 2008

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Thursday, Supper

On the Thursday of the last week of Jesus' earthly ministry, He sent Peter and John into Jerusalem to secure a room for He and His disciples to celebrate Passover — one of the biggest holidays of the Jewish year. ^(Lk 22:7-13) The meal they shared that night, which is now known as the Last Supper, took place within hours of Jesus' arrest where He was led away into the catacombs of the temple, interrogated, blind folded and struck on the face by members of the Sanhedrin ^(Mt 26:67) as they mocked Him, saying "If you are a prophet, then by all means, prophecy. Tell us who hit you." ^(Lk 22:64) All this was just hours away.

Last time, we went around the table to remember who Jesus' twelve disciples were. One thing they shared was they all heard certain declarations from Jesus over the years which none of them really understood. One bit of information Jesus had given which they had failed to grasp was that there was a traitor in their midst. ^(Jn 6:70-71, cf. 12:4) Though Jesus knew the conspirator's identity, He never outed him because that traitor had a job to do. We come now to the night of the betrayer's treachery.

The Gospel writers rarely refer to themselves in the 1st person. In Matthew's account of his own conversion, he refers to himself in the third person as Levi. John does this as well, only he tends to refer to himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved." ^(v. 23, also, Jn 19:26, 20:2, 21:7, 21:20) We presume he is referring to himself due to the intimate details of that disciple's knowledge of private moments. John's account of this last supper is one example where we see that detail, and for good reason—he was seated right next to Jesus, close enough to lean against Him. ^(Jn 13:23) He heard every word Jesus said that night. Let us look at John's account of a necessary but horrible moment—Judas' departure into darkness.

John 13:21-30

²¹After saying these things, Jesus was troubled in his spirit, and testified, "Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me." ²²The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he spoke. ²³One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was reclining at table close to Jesus, ²⁴so Simon Peter motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. ²⁵So that disciple, leaning back against Jesus, said to him, "Lord, who is it?" ²⁶Jesus answered, "It is he to whom I will give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it." So when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot.

²⁷Then after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, "What you are going to do, do quickly."

²⁸Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him.

²⁹Some thought that, because Judas had the moneybag, Jesus was telling him, "Buy what we need for the feast," or that he should give something to the poor. ³⁰So, after receiving the morsel of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.

Jesus Was Troubled

When Jesus spoke these words, He had just finished washing His disciples' feet, explaining how they all needed Him to make them clean, and that not all of them were clean. He said one had lifted his heel against Jesus. In today's text, Jesus moves from euphemisms to something much more direct; "One of you will betray me." ^(v. 21) Now they understood Him and were deeply saddened, ^(Mt 26:22) asking "Is it I?" ^(Mk 14:19) This is a much better question than "It is him?" They'd been with Jesus long enough to know what one of them was capable of, they all were.

It is easy to fix on Jesus' divinity in times like this to the point that we forget His humanity. But as Hebrews 4:15 reminds us, Jesus is "one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin." This moment in the upper room is a sober example of the truth of this statement. John tells us Jesus was troubled in His spirit. He was upset, emotionally raw. The last three years of His life had been intense years of active ministry in and around Judea. His closest friends in the world were there in that room. So was His betrayer. And the cross was immanent.

More than that, Jesus knew He was about to take upon Himself the full weight of God's wrath toward the sins of His people. Don't think for a minute Jesus was just skating through this as though it was some kind of a trick He was about to pull. His burden was heavy, real, and escalating. Here at the start of the supper, Jesus was troubled. But by the end of the night, His anxiety had intensified to the point that His sweat became like drops of blood, a condition brought on by great stress.

To understand Jesus' struggle, we just need to imagine the scene. Have you ever been at a table where you could sense one person was harboring a bitter resentment against another in the room? Even when you don't know the details, the tension is palpable. Everyone senses something is wrong. Now imagine the bitter man is conspiring to have his enemy killed. Then imagine the one he means to betray is aware of his plan. This is the context of the meal Jesus and His disciples sit down to.

The way John describes this moment tells us he sat next to Jesus that night. Judas also sat close, possibly on Jesus' other side. See how John describes it. When Jesus said there was a betrayer in the room, Simon Peter covertly motions to John to ask Jesus who it is. ^(v. 24) So John leans back against Jesus and asks, "Who is it?" ^(v. 25) Jesus' answer conceals Judas' identity from everyone except John and Peter, if he is watching, saying "It is he to whom I will give this bread when I have dipped it." Jesus dips the bread and gives it to Judas. ^(v. 26) The rest of this text makes it clear no one else picked up on what was happening.

Even Judas didn't seem to know this action was a sign to John and Peter that he was the betrayer. When Jesus handed the bread to Judas, He said, "What you are going to do, do quickly." ^(v. 27) Although the other disciples didn't know why He said this, Judas understood. Imagine that moment! Imagine the proximity. Imagine the bread in Jesus' hand as He dips it into the bowl and offers it to Judas. Imagine Judas taking the bread as their eyes meet and Jesus saying, through His words and His penetrating gaze, "Judas, it's time for us both to finish what we've started." Imagine everything Judas must have seen in Jesus' eyes. Imagine everything Jesus saw in Judas' eyes. Jesus was greatly troubled.

The Riddle Of Judas

While writing her play about Jesus, *“The Man Born to Be King,”* Dorothy Sayers struggled to understand what drove Judas. She asked herself, *“What did the man imagine he was doing? He is an absolute riddle. He can’t have been awful from the start, or Christ never would have called Him.”* (Coomes, Dorothy L. Sayers, 16) He **is** a riddle. What did drive him? We know he was greedy and that he skimmed off the top. (Jn 12:6) But the money the chief priests offered in exchange for Jesus, thirty pieces of silver (roughly four month’s wages), hardly compensates for the three years he spent following Jesus. Three years of service for four month’s wages doesn’t wash for an economically minded man like Judas.

Though no one can really say conclusively all that drove Judas, there are some things we do know. **FIRST**, we know the man he **seemed** to be. He seemed to be a devoted disciple who did the same things as the others. Even here in the upper room, he had concealed his duplicity so well that when Jesus declared one of them would betray Him, no one immediately pointed in Judas’ direction. To look at him, you saw a man who seemed to walk closely with Jesus, just like the other eleven.

SECOND, we know that though he was destined by God for this role, he acted under the influence of Satan. John labors to make us understand that it wasn’t just that Judas was indifferent to Jesus. He was acting in collusion with the devil here. (Jn 6:70, 13:2, 27) Think of all he saw and heard—every miracle, parable, act of mercy and unimpeachable rebuke. Neither Jesus’ words nor His actions penetrated Judas’ heart. He was a riddle—part pragmatist, part pretender, part conspirator. Maybe even he couldn’t even explain his own reasons, but what he became was what Robert Rayburn described as *“the archetype of all traitors, Judas Iscariot, perhaps the most dishonored name in the history of mankind.”* Still, at the time no one **thought** he was a traitor.

And It Was Night

For Jesus, the head of the feast, to offer bread to Judas was an understood honor. It was a gesture of love, an opportunity to consider their bond and their history together. That moment was the hinge on which Judas’ life turned. It was a moment of decision, and Judas’ mind was made up. He took the bread from Jesus’ hand and then he left. I wonder if he unaffectedly popped that bread into his mouth. I wonder if he was still chewing as he slipped out of the room. Everyone figured since he kept the money, he was off to settle a tab or give the customary Passover alms to the poor on their behalf. They were wrong.

John writes from the perspective of one who saw this moment unfold with his own eyes, and in a moment of poetic flourish, he tells us what was really going on as Judas disappeared. He writes, *“He went out, and it was night.”* (v. 30) Light and darkness are prevalent symbols throughout John’s Gospel. He often spoke of Jesus as the Light of the World. (Jn 1:9, 3:19, 8:12, 9:5, 11:9, 12:46) So as Judas leaves, John describes a man abandoning the Light of the World to step irreversibly into the darkness. His departure would lead not only to Jesus’ death, but also to his own.

What are we to do with this part of the story of the last week of Jesus’ earthly ministry? One obvious, haunting application for us is that no one at Jesus’ table knew Judas was a pretender. Only Judas and Jesus knew this. Still, Jesus was gracious with him to the end, even giving him a seat close to His in that upper room. Jesus left open the door for Judas to repent, knowing what was in his heart. In the end, Judas’ path takes him where it was destined to go—out into the darkness to his own doom.

Is Christ offering you the bread of reconciliation today? I believe in a God who calls His people to Himself, and I believe He is a God of means—so I ask; Is He speaking to you through the example of Judas? Are you pretending? This is the third week in a row we’ve talked about Judas’ proximity to Jesus, and how proximity alone couldn’t save him. If you are a pretender, there are only two here who know it—you and Jesus. There is grace and joy to be found in Him, but this isn’t a game. Judas reminds us you can sit under solid teaching, spend time with believers, even participate in ministry and still be a fraud. Being known as a Christian and loving Jesus can be two entirely different things.

When we look at this story of betrayal, we see the unvarnished truth of what resides in the hearts of men. We think, *“What did Jesus ever do to deserve such venom from Judas?”* We see that the story unfolding here in the pages of scripture pivots on the fulcrum of betrayal. But we miss the point if we think Jesus went to the cross simply because Judas betrayed Him. Jesus went to the cross because mankind as a whole has betrayed the relationship with God we were meant for, exchanging it for what amounts to a pittance. Judas only represents a cross-section of the betrayal that led Jesus to the cross.

But Jesus didn’t go to the cross as a martyr or as a helpless victim. All throughout this series we have seen a strength in Jesus—a steely resolve to finish what He had come to do. And here, even with His heart broken over His friend’s betrayal (*since you can’t really have betrayal without a pre-existing bond of friendship*) Jesus again puts His strength on display, instituting the Lord’s Supper for the remaining eleven. We’ll examine that next time, but for now understand that when Judas left, Jesus reached for bread and tore it apart with His hands, telling **and showing** His disciples what was about to happen to Him.

For His part, Jesus did not disappear into the darkness. No sorrow, no loss, no betrayal would turn Him from the purpose for which He had come—to die in the place of sinners who are all not only capable but guilty of betraying the relationship with God we were created to know and enjoy. As you see Judas go out into the darkness, may you also see Jesus, the Light of the World, stay there at that table, unshakably dedicated to His mission to die in your place. He loves you. Do you love Him?

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