

Betrayed!
Mark 14:17-21
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There is a sense in which the sting of personal betrayal is one of life's most tragic and devastating trials. As I thought about that this week, I was reminded that perhaps history's most famous betrayal is remembered by William Shakespeare in his magnificent play "Julius Caesar". As Brutus, the friend and confidante of Julius Caesar, plunges his knife into Caesar, Shakespeare has Caesar utter that famous line, "Et tu, Brute?" You too, Brutus? Later in that play, you remember that Antony, Caesar's loyal friend, makes an impassioned speech in defense of Caesar's loyalty to Rome. And in that speech, Antony utters the most famous lines in English literature about the pain of personal betrayal. As he contemplates and remembers, the thrust of the dagger from Brutus, Caesar's supposed friend, this is what he says,

This was the most unkindest cut of all; for when the noble Caesar saw him stab, ingratitude, more strong than traitors' arms, quite vanquished him. Then burst his mighty heart and, in his mantle muffling up his face, even at the base of Pompey's statue, while all the while ran blood, great Caesar fell. Oh, what a fall was there, my countrymen! Then I and you, and all of us fell down, whilst bloody treason flourished over us. [The sting of betrayal.]

But there is one betrayal that far surpasses that of Brutus to Caesar, and you know what it is. It's the betrayal of God's own Son by one of the very men He chose to represent Him. That man's name of course is Judas Iscariot. That's the passage to which we come tonight. We've already read of the plot. Tonight, Jesus announces who it is. Mark 14, look at verse 17,

When it was evening Jesus came with the twelve. As they were reclining *at the table* and eating, Jesus said, "Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me - one who is eating with Me." They began to be grieved and to

say to Him one by one, “Surely not I?” And He said to them, “*It is one of the twelve, one who dips with Me in the bowl. For the Son of Man is to go just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born.*”

In this passage, Jesus correctly prophesied that He would be betrayed by one of the twelve apostles. Again, I wish there were times that you had never heard the story. I wish you were reading it for the first time. I wish you could be captured by the shocking nature of what Jesus just says. If you’d never heard of Judas’ betrayal but you were familiar with the rest of the New Testament, if you understood Jesus’ divine nature, if you understood His wisdom and His power, His capacity to work miracles, His ability to understand the human heart, you would be shocked to discover that one of His personally selected representatives, one of the twelve men closest to Him and in whom He had invested three years of His life was in fact a traitor. But that is exactly the message of all four gospel writers.

Just to remind you of the context of this, on Wednesday of the Passion Week Jesus and eleven of His disciples rested, but Judas was very busy. He left Bethany and went into the city of Jerusalem under some cover or guise. And there he discovered that the chief priests had all assembled in the courtyard of Caiaphas, the high priest. As their meeting came to a close (as divine providence would have it,) Judas arrived. And there he worked out the deal. He sold Jesus for thirty pieces of silver, the price of a slave. That was Wednesday.

On Thursday morning, the disciples approached Jesus about where they should prepare to celebrate the Passover meal. Last week, we looked at this. In response, Jesus sent Peter and John on a very secretive, really clandestine kind of mission. They were to enter the city of Jerusalem, having gone the two miles from Bethany over the Mount of Olives into the city. And there they were to watch for a man carrying a jar of water, which would have been very unusual in the first century in Jerusalem. And they were to follow that

man until he went into a house. And then they were to approach the owner of the house with these words, verse 14,

“... wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, ‘The Teacher says, “Where is My guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?’” Remarkably, Peter and John had done all of this and had found everything just as Jesus said it would be. And there in a fully furnished, prepared upper room, Peter and John made final preparations for Jesus to host His last Passover.

Verse 17 then brings up to speed, “When it was evening, He came with the twelve.” Exodus 12:8 said that the Passover could only be eaten at night on the fifteenth of Nisan. By Jewish reckoning, that had begun at sunset on Thursday night. In addition, the scribes had said that the Passover meal had to be completed by midnight based on some texts in the Old Testament. So, to fit everything in that happened in the upper room that night, Jesus must have come sometime between late afternoon and what we would call early evening – probably sometime between about five and seven p.m. although we can’t be absolutely sure.

Mark specifically says, notice, that He came with the twelve. Now Peter and John were already in Jerusalem preparing so this may simply mean Jesus and the other ten cause “the twelve” was often a shorthand description of the disciples. It’s also possible that Peter and John had returned after they finished their preparations the two miles over the Mount of Olives to Bethany and there had told Jesus that it was ready, and then Jesus and all twelve of them had returned to the upper room.

Another important point to make is that John says they were reclining, or they reclined at the table. For formal events, for special events, for festivals, it was the custom in the first century to have a U-shaped table. The guests would sit on the outside of the “U”, and those who were serving the meal would serve from inside the “U”. And the guests would literally recline. Either they would recline propped up on pillows off the floor or on low

couches that were made for this purpose. Each person would rest on his left elbow and left side with his chest and head and right arm available to eat from the table.

Now, once they arrived at the upper room and had gotten settled at the table, Mark seems to imply that Jesus quickly announced His betrayer. But when you put the rest of the gospel records together, this was not the first event to transpire. Let me give you a timeline, (an order of events) for that evening when we put the gospel records and what we know of the Passover celebration in the first century together. Shortly after the twelve and Jesus arrived at the upper room and took their places, Jesus, as the head of the feast, probably followed the traditional liturgy that was followed at that time. He would have begun by pronouncing the blessing over the first cup of wine. There were four cups of wine that sort of marked intervals through the meal. When we get to the Lord's Table, we'll talk about the last two cups, but the first cup came early on obviously. And at the Passover meal their wine was always red. It was required.

After He blessed the first cup, and they all drank out of the common cup together, Luke records that Jesus continued with these words, Luke 22:14, "When the hour had come, He reclined at the table, and the apostles with Him. And He said to them, 'I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I will never again eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.'" This is how Jesus begins the Last Supper.

Then, according to the apostle John, Jesus did something very unusual. Normally at this stage of the Passover meal, the host or the head of the family provided water for each person to dip their hands in as a ceremonial cleansing, a ceremonial washing. Perhaps Jesus did that. We don't know. It's not recorded in the gospels. But regardless, He did much more than that. Look at John 13, John 13:1,

Now before the Feast of Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the [nth degree, to the uttermost

is the idea, to perfection].... During supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, *the son* of Simon, to betray Him, *Jesus*, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He'd come forth from God and was going back to God, got up from the supper [this would be at this point early on], and [He] laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself. Then He poured water into the basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.

Again, picture the scene. They're all lying on their couches or on their pads with their feet behind them. And Jesus gets up and, instead of offering them a little bowl of water in which to dip their hands, He goes to each one, and He washes their feet. You remember the story when He comes to Peter.

, “Lord, ... You [can't] wash my feet.” And Jesus says, verse 8, ... “If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.’ Simon Peter said to Him, ‘... *then* [don't wash just my feet], but ... my hands and my head [because I belong to You].’ [And] Jesus said to him, “He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; you [plural, you disciples] are clean, but not all *of you*. For He knew the one who was betraying Him; for this reason He said, “Not all of you are clean.”

So ,when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined ,,” He said this is what I want you to do. I want you to serve one another. Now go down to verse 18,

“I do not speak of all of you. I know the ones I have chosen; but *it is* that the Scripture may be fulfilled, ‘HE WHO EATS MY BREAD HAS LIFTED UP HIS HEEL AGAINST ME.’ From now on I am telling you before it comes to pass, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am *He*. Truly I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who

receives Me receives Him who sent Me.” [Jesus begins to give a hint that something is not right.]

Now after that, after the ceremonial washing (in this case, of feet and not hands) with two lessons – the lesson of serving one another and also the lesson of once you’ve been cleaned by Jesus, once you’ve had a bath, you’ve been justified, you’ve been saved. You don’t need to do that again. You just need to have your feet washed. You need to be cleansed from the daily mud and muck that you pick up on your feet walking through this world.

After that, Jesus would have dipped– (He would have regained His place at the table), He would have dipped the bitter herbs into a bowl of salt water, have eaten those herbs, and then passed them to others to eat as well. Often these bitter herbs were, were dipped into charoset. It’s a thick fruit sauce composed of dried fruit, spices and vinegar.

All of these things were pictures, still are to this day. If you’ve ever been to a Passover Seder, you know that. But all of them are pictures without any explanation. So, the next part of the Passover meal traditionally and undoubtedly that night was the explanation. The Mishnah had said that the youngest son, the youngest person present was responsible to ask the father or the host why this night was different from all other nights. In response to that, the oldest male or the father was to explain then to everyone present the significance of the Passover and the items that they would eat together.

The father or the host, the head of this meal was to recount the history of the Jewish people beginning from the calling of Abraham through the exodus. He was to explain that the unleavened bread was because their fathers were redeemed from Egypt and had to leave in a hurry, and they didn’t have time for the bread to rise. The bitter herbs with their salt water were because the Egyptians had embittered the lives of their fathers in Egypt. The charoset with its thick consistency was to picture the mortar out of which they had made bricks. The lamb represented the lamb whose blood was posted on the doorpost of every Israelite home so that the death angel would pass over the houses of their fathers in

Egypt according to Exodus 12:26-27. So, he would explain. Jesus undoubtedly explained that night. Wouldn't it have been wonderful to have heard?

That would have been followed, when the explanation was finished, all of those who gathered would have sung the first part of a group of Psalms that together were called the "Hallel"; specifically, Psalms 113 - 118 – that was the great "Hallel". At this point in the dinner, they would have sung the first two of those, Psalm 113 and Psalm 114.

Then came the drinking of the second cup, and I'll explain more about the cups when we look at the Lord's Supper. After that came unleavened bread. Jesus took a loaf of unleavened bread and blessing it with these words or something very similar, 'Blessed art Thou who bringeth forth bread from the earth.' That's an ancient Hebrew blessing and benediction. Then He would have broken the loaf into pieces and handed it to all of His guests.

Now all of that was, so far, introduction. After all of that, the actual meal would have been served. With that background, I want you to notice again the specific time that Mark gives us in verse 18, "As they were reclining at the table and eating...." Matthew says, "As they were eating...." This is a reference to the meal proper. It happens at this point in the festivities, in the celebration. What Mark describes in verse 18 occurred during the meal itself. So all of those preliminaries have already transpired. And in that context, we have the prophecy of the betrayal. The rest of this paragraph records Jesus prophesying His betrayal by one of the twelve, and then the various reactions of the people present. So, let's begin as we unfold this passage by looking at Jesus' first clear prophecy. On several occasions before this, Jesus had made it very clear that He would be delivered over, that He would be betrayed. Previously, He had said this to His disciples. If you look back in Mark 9, Mark 9:31,

For He was teaching His disciples and telling them, "The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him; and when He

has been killed, He will rise again three days later.” But they did not understand *this* statement, and they were afraid to ask Him.

In 10:33 as they were walking on the road up to Jerusalem headed to this final Passover, He said to them, “Behold, we are going ... to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and will hand Him over to the Gentiles.” Do you notice how cryptic Jesus was in His announcement of how He would be betrayed? He simply says He will be delivered over. That’s all He says.

Now Mark has already let us in as readers on who this is. Back in 14:10 and 11, we learn that it’s Judas. But before that Thursday night that we’re looking at in Mark 14, Jesus had intentionally been vague with His own disciples about the identity of the betrayer. Now for the first time as they’re eating the Passover meal, Jesus drops an absolute bombshell on the disciples. He’s told them He’s going to be delivered over. That’s the word, by the way, that’s translated ‘betrayed’ in other places. He’s told them that’s going to happen. But in verse 18, “As they were reclining *at the table* and eating (as they’re eating the Passover lamb), Jesus said, “Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me - one who is eating with Me.”

John explains to us what prompted Jesus to say this. In John 13:21, it says, “... He became troubled in spirit (and then said this) ...,” undoubtedly troubled that the betrayer was still there. Remember He wants, at this point He wants to express His love to His own. He wants to teach them. He wants to equip them. And His Spirit is troubled, probably both for Judas as well as for the rest of the disciples.

Now all four gospels record our Lord’s words here. So they’re absolutely crucial in the story of His life and His death. Notice again what He says. He begins with that familiar expression of solemnity, “Truly I say to you [Jesus wants them to know that what He’s about to tell them is just as certain as all of the other truths that He’s communicated to

them], one of you will betray Me [literally ‘one of you will deliver Me over’].” He had already said I’m going to be delivered over, and now He said it’s going to be one of you.

But notice what Jesus adds at the end of verse 18: “... one who is eating with Me.” This is a specific allusion back to an Old Testament passage, back to Psalm 41:9 that Jesus had already quoted earlier that evening in John that I read for you a moment ago, but still with some vagueness to it. In its context, this is what the Psalm says. Psalm 41:9, “Even my close friend in whom I trusted, Who ate my bread, Has lifted up his heel against me.” In its context, this is a reference to the infamous deceit of Ahithophel, who was David’s counselor and who changed sides and went to Absalom. Jesus says, “There’s an Ahithophel at this table. There is someone who was once on My side but no longer is.”

Now this Old Testament allusion accomplishes two objectives. It connects the betrayal of Jesus with the Old Testament. And it also highlights the horrific nature of Judas’ sin because in the cultures of the Near East, it was unthinkable (and to some extent still is this day, it was unthinkable) to accept a person’s hospitality and friendship offered in a common meal and then to betray that person. That’s the implication behind this. Jesus says it’s one of you.

Notice in verse 19 the apostle’s reaction. I don’t think we can begin to imagine the blow that Jesus’ statement was to the disciples. They had no idea before this. They hadn’t read the story. It was a sudden, devastating blow to the solar plexus. It left them absolutely breathless, their minds reeling. The gospel writers described their reactions in several different ways. Here in verse 19, Mark says, “... they began to be grieved.” Matthew writes, “... they were deeply grieved.” They were struck with a sense of utter discouragement and despair and shock and grief. They began to be grieved.

John adds in John 13:22, “The disciples *began* looking at one another, at a loss to know of which one He was speaking.” You can picture the scene unfold. Jesus says as they’re eating their meal, “It’s one of you.” They began to be grieved. They began to look around with these quizzical looks, wondering, “Who could it be?” Luke adds in Luke 22:23,

“They began to discuss among themselves which one of them it might be who was going to do this thing.” You can see this unfold. Suddenly, little conversations break out around the table as they continue eating, “Who could it be?” [This is shocking!]

Back here in verse 19, “They began to be grieved and to say to Him one by one, ‘Surely not I?’” The Greek expression here pictures a very interesting picture. It pictures each of the disciples individually asking Jesus this question – “one after one” literally the Greek text says. One after one, they said – and the question they, the way they asked the question in the Greek text expects a negative answer, and yet they’re still worried. There’s a sense of grief and worry, “And surely it’s not me, Lord? Tell me it’s not me.” Apparently all of them except Judas, who will ask privately in a few minutes as we’ll see, one by one asked Jesus, “Surely, surely Lord it’s not me?” This is their response.

Now after their reaction, Jesus tightens the circle. Let’s look at the smaller circle as He, as He hones in on who the betrayer is. Look at verse 20, “And He said to them, ‘*It is* one of the twelve, one who dips with Me in the bowl.’” Jesus again reiterates that it’s one of them. It is one of the twelve, but then He adds something else. Notice the end of verse 20, “*It is* the one who is dipping with Me in the bowl.” In another gospel, it says, “It’s the one who dipped with Me in the bowl.”

Now again, you have to picture the scene. Let me remind you of what that scene would have looked like. Although Jesus and the disciples shared a single cup of wine and passed it to each one (that’s clear to the picture that we’ll get), it is likely that with a U-shaped table and thirteen people around the table there were several bowls of charoset scattered around the table for the disciples to dip their bread into. Almost certainly, there would have been at least one bowl for each of the three parts of the U-shaped table. That would mean that somewhere between four to five people were likely sharing the same bowl. So, with verse 20, it’s possible that Jesus narrowed the field of potential betrayers from the twelve (and all scattered around the table) to the three or four that were seated with Him at His table.

Now He moves from that narrowing of the field to, to the theological reasons behind all of this in verse 21, the theological reasons. Look at verse 21, “For ..., the Son of Man (here’s why the betrayal has to happen, for the Son of Man) is [to go just as it is written of Him;] but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born.” This is one of the most theologically profound verses in all of the New Testament because in one very simple sentence, (Jesus or a couple of sentences actually, but one verse), Jesus connects Himself to all of the Old Testament prophecies about both the Son of Man from Daniel 7 and Isaiah’s suffering servant. And at the same time, He also explains the relationship between divine sovereignty and human responsibility.

Notice what He says. “The Son of Man is to go (that is, He is to be betrayed to death which He has already indicated) just as it is written of Him...” Now Jesus here connects two concepts from the Old Testament that had before been unconnected. Jesus often referred to Himself as the Son of Man, and He will make this crystal clear in, in the trial we’ll look at in a few weeks that He’s referring to Daniel 7 when He uses that expression.

But nowhere in the Old Testament is this figure in Daniel 7, the Son of Man, said to suffer and to die. Instead, the coming person who is said to suffer and to die is Isaiah’s suffering servant in the, in the servant songs, the four servant songs of Isaiah (of course, the most famous one being Isaiah 53, part of - or all of Isaiah 53’s part of that song, but part of chapter 52 is as well). But here in the upper room, Jesus says, ‘The Son of Man is also the suffering servant of Isaiah, and both of those prophecies point to Me.’

Remarkable.

But notice how Jesus connects the issue of divine sovereignty and human responsibility in this betrayal. He says, “The Son of Man is to go just as it is written of Him...” Written where? Read Psalm 22, read Isaiah 53, and of course hinted at in the betrayal of Ahithophel that Jesus has just quoted from Psalm 41. ‘My betrayal,’ Jesus says, ‘was written before. It is part of God’s eternal, divine plan. And He even told you that plan in

Isaiah's case seven hundred years before that night, and in David's case a thousand years before that night.'

But the fact that the betrayal of Judas was part of God's eternal plan in no way lessened Judas' personal guilt. Look at the rest of verse 21, "... but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed!" The Greek word for "woe" expresses the ideas of both pain and displeasure. That man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed will experience both unthinkable suffering and God's extreme displeasure. In fact, Jesus goes on to say, "It would have been good for that man if he had not been born." Literally, the Greek text says it this way, "Good for him if he had not been born that man."

Now remember, Judas is sitting right there. That is not a threat from our Lord. It is the ultimate expression of divine wrath. Jesus says, "Listen. Judas has a destiny to fulfill. It has been written. But at the same time, Judas is personally guilty for his actions." God didn't make Judas the monster he had become. It was an expression of his own greedy, evil heart. And today as we sit here in the twenty-first century, he endures, and he always will endure God's wrath because of his own personal guilt.

Can I just stop here and say there are people who blame God for their lack of belief? Don't you dare blame God's sovereignty or God's election for your refusal to believe in Jesus Christ. Listen to what Jesus said in John 5:40 – "... you are unwilling to come to Me..." That's the issue. Not that it's God's problem – it's that you're not willing. "If anyone wills (Jesus says), let him come." That's where divine sovereignty and human responsibility come together.

Now as we move on from this text, we find, in another place, the specific identification. Now to understand what happens next, you have to remember how a meal like this would have been eaten in the first century. I've shown you the layout. The table there is just twelve to eighteen inches off of the floor. The guests are reclining to eat. They're lying on pads, on low couches or low couches long enough for the entire body. These pads would have probably been lain at a forty-five-degree angle to the table. Each guest was leaning on his left elbow eating with his right hand.

Judas, it becomes immediately obvious, was on Jesus' left, a position of a guest of honor. On the other side to Jesus' right was the apostle John because we're told that John's head was against Jesus' chest. And so, Jesus is reclining on His left elbow. To this side is Judas, to His left. To His right is John the apostle. John's head then would have been near Jesus' chest.

Peter, who was apparently on either the other side of John or perhaps even some think on the other side of the table, gestures to John quietly to ask Jesus, "Who is it?" Look at John 13. John lets us in on this. Of course, he was part of all of this as it unfolded. Verse 23, "There was reclining on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved. [So, Simon Peter gestured to Him (you can just see this - I mean, it's a tragic moment but there's some humor to it as well. I mean, Peter, this is killing him.) Who is it? And so, he gestures to John) and said to him, "Tell us who it is of whom He is speaking." John then, leaning back on Jesus' chest (so you can picture John sort of leaning back over and Jesus is, is here on his left), he asks Him,

"... Lord, who is it?" Jesus then answered, "That is the one for whom I shall dip the morsel and give it to him." So when He had dipped the morsel, He took and gave it to Judas, *the son* of Simon Iscariot." [Again, this has to mean that Judas is seated to Jesus' left. So, Jesus takes a piece of unleavened bread. He dips it in that, that thick fruit sauce, the charoset, and then He hands it to Judas.]

So, the apostle John now knows it's Judas, and perhaps, we don't know, he was able to somehow signal Peter that it was Judas. Matthew is the only gospel record to tell us that right after Jesus handed Judas the morsel, Judas spoke privately to Jesus. So, get the interchange here. Peter has signaled John. John asked him who it is. John leans back and asks Jesus who it is. Jesus said it's the one to whom I'm about to give this piece of unleavened bread dipped in the charoset. He dips it in, hands it to his left to Judas. And then Judas, having received that from Jesus, speaks to Jesus.

And this is what he says in Matthew 26:25 - “And Judas, who was betraying Him, said, ‘Surely it’s not I, Rabbi?’ Jesus said to him, ‘You have said *it* yourself.’” With incredible hypocrisy and hubris, Judas asked Jesus if he’s the betrayer. He’s already arranged the betrayal the day before. He already has the thirty silver coins somewhere in his possession. And Jesus quietly and privately says to Judas, ‘Yes, it’s you. And I know it’s you.’ Now John picks up the story in verse 27. John 13:27,

After the morsel, Satan then entered into him. Therefore Jesus said to him, “What you do, do quickly.” Now no one of those reclining *at the table* knew for what purpose Jesus had said this to him.” [So, they heard not the private interchange where Judas asked, “Is it, is it I? Am I the betrayer” and, and Jesus says, “Yes, it’s you.” But they hear Jesus say,] “What you do, [go and] do quickly,” [... and they don’t know what it means.] Verse 29, ... some were supposing, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus was saying to him, “Buy the things we have need of for the feast”; or else, that he should give something to the poor. [Those were a couple of legitimate uses. Often at feast times, there were alms given to the poor. Maybe there were things they needed for the next day.] So after receiving the morsel he went out immediately....

Now at this point, Jesus knew it was Judas, John knew it was Judas (Jesus, Judas rather), and possibly Peter knew it was Judas, but nobody else suspects a thing. And so, in verse 30, we read, “So after receiving the morsel Judas went out immediately; and it was night.” Judas left in order to arrange to lead a group of soldiers to arrest Jesus. As we’ll see, I think (I can’t prove this to you, but I believe) he came first to the upper room where Mark enters the story (we’ll talk about that in coming weeks), and then went to Gethsemane where he knew Jesus often resorted and knew that He couldn’t leave the city of Jerusalem that night because the feast had to be eaten within the city of Jerusalem. Passover had to be celebrated there so he suspected it had to be somewhere within the confines of the expanded city limits for feast time, and that meant Gethsemane.

But he goes to lead this group of soldiers to arrest Jesus. Notice John ends verse 30 with these chilling words: "... and it was night." Not only was it nighttime outside the upper room, but I think the idea has a double meaning. It was midnight in the heart of Judas.

Now why? Why did Jesus make such a point of identifying His betrayer? Why do all four gospel writers record it? What is the point? Well, I think there are several important reasons behind Jesus announcing His betrayer. First of all, consider the one for Jesus Himself. For Jesus, it was a vindication of God's power just like with Old Testament prophecies. Why, for example, did God make sure that the fall of Israel was prophesied before it happened? Because what would the countries around think if their armies captured the Israelites, what would've been their first conclusion? Our gods are stronger. Our gods are greater.

And so, God announced it several hundred years in advance so that when it happened, it became obvious it wasn't because that nation's gods were stronger. It was because this was part of His plan. And I think this same thing is happening here. It is a vindication of God's power. Jesus wasn't too weak and feeble and frail to resist what was going on. He was, He wasn't too unintelligent to catch that there was a betrayer. It was part of the plan, and He announces it beforehand so that when it happens, it's obvious this is part of the plan.

I think for the disciples, there was another purpose. Jesus intended this announcement to provide confidence for the disciples. Look again at John 13:19. Just before He announces who it is and that it's one of them, verse 19, He says, "From now on I am telling you before *it* comes to pass, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am ... [you may believe that I'm everything I claimed, that I'm everything I said.]"

Jesus prophesied His betrayal before it happened. He predicted the fact that He would be betrayed. He predicted how many of His disciples would defect – only one of the twelve. He identified exactly which one would betray Him. And He even identified when He would be betrayed. I think the gospel writers include this account for the same reason, not

only for the disciples that were there that night, but for all of us who follow Jesus. It explains the betrayal, and it strengthens our confidence in who Jesus really was and is.

But I think there was also a purpose behind this announcement for Judas. Jesus arranged the early part of the Passover meal while Judas was still there for one primary purpose, and that was to provide a gracious invitation to repentance and forgiveness. Think about everything that happened between Jesus and Judas that night.

First of all, He gave Judas a seat of honor on His left hand. Remember, they're going to argue about who's the greatest here in a moment. You can bet that had already been going on. And who got the chief seats next to Jesus? John, the beloved apostle, is on one side, and Judas is on the other.

Also, as if He were Judas' personal slave, Jesus washed his feet. And in so doing, He again explained and illustrated the great truths of justification and forgiveness for sin. You understand by washing his feet and by the explanation Jesus gave, Jesus had essentially said to Judas, "My dear friend, you are not clean but you can be."

There's a third way Jesus reached out that night. Jesus revealed in that setting that He knew there was a betrayer and that He knew it was Judas. Remember, Judas is sitting right next to Him when Jesus makes this announcement. And ironically, and here's the, here's the real irony in this. Ironically, when Jesus alluded to Psalm 41 about Ahithophel, He was even predicting where Judas' treachery would end.

If you're familiar with the story, how did Ahithophel end his life? He hung himself. He betrayed David to follow Absalom and then later hung himself. Jesus, in His mercy and grace, was warning Judas that if he stayed on the same course, his life would end the same way. In offering Judas the morsel, Jesus was extending an offer to him of genuine friendship. This is how things worked in the ancient world. This was an expression of His love and care.

Judas is a wonderful example of receiving the patience and longsuffering of God. Jesus was never anything but kind to Judas, providing him every opportunity to repent. In Gethsemane when Judas shows up with the crowd of soldiers, Jesus still calls him (what?) friend. The life of Judas is a tragic story of the growth of sin in the heart. There is every indication that Judas at one point confessed Jesus as Lord and Savior, and then showed significant zeal and significant enthusiasm for spiritual things. But over time, that original desire was choked out. Perhaps he was, as Matthew 13 describes the seed that, the soil where the seed fell in thorny soil – a heart that was choking out the seed of the gospel by the deceitfulness of wealth.

You know, when I read this story, there is a serious warning here for everyone who is attached in some way to Jesus Christ. It is possible to be connected to Jesus and His followers; it is possible to be a part of a church like this and not be a genuine follower of Jesus Christ. There is no clearer example of that than Judas. A person can look to every Christian around like the real thing and not be. Nobody suspected Judas. And remember, it's possible to even be in active ministry and not be a Christian. Judas was an apostle.

It's possible to be exposed constantly to the truth and to the great examples of devotion to God and to choose the opposite. Judas heard every sermon Jesus ever preached. He lived for at least a year and a half, day and night, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week with the Son of God, the perfect One. And yet, he would not have this Man to rule over him.

Perhaps Judas' story in many ways describes you. And like with Judas, God has been so patient and so gracious with you and perhaps your hard heart toward Him. And He will continue to be gracious, but there is a line over which you will cross. And when you cross that line, there's no going back. There's no more hope for you than there was for Judas. We read about such people in Hebrews 10. Look at it with me - Hebrews 10. This is how the author of Hebrews describes it, Hebrews 10:26. This is Judas, and perhaps this is you,

For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there is no longer a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES. Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on *the testimony of* two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, “VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY.” And again, “THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE.” It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

This isn't for the person who has confessed faith in Christ and is seeking to follow and obey Him but has doubts. This is for the person who hardheartedly knows the truth, but absolutely hardheartedly resists the rule of Jesus Christ in his life, who turns from that to pursue his own way. This is apostasy. And when that happens in a life, there is no hope. That's why earlier in Hebrews, the writer of Hebrews says, “Today is the day of salvation.” That's the warning of the life of Judas.

Let's pray together.

Father, these are hard things, but I pray for anyone here tonight who has sat under the sound of Your word and who has a hard heart against You and spiritual things, just as Judas had, and who knows it, who is very much aware that they will not have Jesus Christ to rule over them. And yet, they're hearing the truth. They're hearing the word taught. They're seeing Christian lives all around them. They're exposed to it.

Father, I pray that You would let the example of Judas strike to their very core. Father, may they understand that they cannot trifle with You, that “... it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” And Father, I pray that tonight before their head hits their pillow, they would hit their knees, humbling their heart before You.

Father, thank You for the example of our Lord's love for Judas. Thank You for His example of His love for His true ones, His disciples, those who have committed themselves to follow Him.

Lord, we, like the disciples, often find ourselves questioning, "Is it I?" But thank You that You who have begun a good work in us are continuing that work and will complete it in the day of Jesus Christ. Keep us faithful to You until that day, leaning on Your love and grace, bowing our knee to Your lordship in our lives.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.