

John: Letting Jesus Down

John 13:21-38

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Please turn in your Bibles to John 13. We are in the upper room and will be for some time as we follow the words and the actions of Jesus in these final hours before He is arrested and taken to be tried and crucified. In chapter 13, He has just predicted and prophesied the betrayal of Judas Iscariot and the denial of Simon Peter, two of His disciples. And in that sense it is not surprising that His next words will be "Let not your heart be troubled." Let's hear the word of God.

When Jesus had said this, He became troubled in spirit, and testified and said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, that one of you will betray Me." The disciples began looking at one another, at a loss to know of which one He was speaking. There was reclining on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved. So Simon Peter gestured to him, and said to him, "Tell us who it is of whom He is speaking." He, leaning back thus on Jesus' bosom, said to 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. 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 He had said this to him. For 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. So after receiving the morsel he went out immediately; and it was night. Therefore when he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him; if God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and will glorify Him immediately. "Little children, I am with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, now I also say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, where are You going?" Jesus answered, "Where I go, you cannot follow Me now; but you will follow later." Peter said to Him, "Lord, why can I not follow You right

now? I will lay down my life for You." Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for Me? Truly, truly, I say to you, a rooster will not crow until you deny Me three times.

Amen. May God bless to us the reading of His holy and inerrant word.

We have just seen the incident of foot washing in the upper room, taking our first look at the closing chapters of John's gospel, which, as one old Scottish minister, Charles Ross, called, "the inner sanctuary." We're all familiar with the simple fact that the bulk of the gospels are devoted to the last week of the life of our Lord. This, of course, is peculiar to the gospels; it's what distinguishes the gospels from simple biographies.

John devotes almost half of the gospel to the last five hours or so of Jesus' life. John Calvin, in trying to distinguish between the various gospels, between Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, says that "Matthew, Mark and Luke show us Christ's body, but John shows us Christ's soul." And in a sense Jesus is revealing to us in these chapters something of His soul, something of His inner self. He gives us a glimpse of the fellowship He enjoys with the Father and with the Holy Spirit. He speaks of Him going away and coming again, and the bestowment of the Holy Spirit as the witness of Jesus Christ.

Here, in John 13, he begins to unfold something of the significance of what He's doing and the events that are transpiring in the upper room and will lead to the cross of Calvary, revealing something of His innermost glory. Did you catch what He says in verse 31-32, when He speaks of the relationship that He has with the Father, and the Father's relationship with Him, and that there is something transpiring now in the upper room that reflects and reveals and manifests something of the essential glory, not only of the human Jesus, but of the divine Jesus, "Now is the Son of Man glorified." God the Father is glorified in the Son in something that happens to the Son in these hours, the Father is glorified, Jesus is glorified, the Son is glorified in the Father and the Father is glorified in the Son. Something of the very essence of who Jesus is and something of the very essence of who God is, is being manifested, is being revealed in what is transpiring here in the upper room. As Jesus unfolds His obedience to the covenant of redemption, as He becomes the suffering servant of the Lord something of the glory of God is being displayed.

Yes, in the darkness of this chapter, that's the astonishing thing. In the darkness of the closing verses of John 13, with the prediction of Judas' betrayal and with Peter's denial, in the very darkness there shines something of the glory of God--that's the astonishing thing. Something of the very essence of God is being displayed here; love is being displayed here--eternal, ineffable love is being displayed. Love is at work. In this place, here in this upper room, with betrayal and denial before Him; the love of God, the love of Jesus, the love of the Father for the Son, the love of the Son for the Father, the love of God for sinners is

being displayed. “Now is the Son of Man glorified” in the midst of this darkness before the face of this darkness. This is not a glory that is shining up there and beyond and out of sight; it is in the darkness that the glory is being displayed.

I'm reminded of the words of Augustine, “I see the depths, but I cannot see the bottom.” I see the depths, and there are deep things here. There are mysteries here; there are incomprehensibilities here, but I cannot see the bottom. The brightness of the glory is more marvelous because it is portrayed against the dark shadows of a betrayal by one and a denial by another. And these are brought together by John in the closing verses of John, chapter 13, so that we might see that in the very heart of Jesus, love resides here.

It might be of some merit, of course, to consider these two stories, of Judas on the one hand and of Peter on the other, as separate stories, but John has brought them together. He has put them side by side so that we might compare and contrast and ask the question that John wants us to ask, “How can we be sure that we're not Judas? And how can we be sure that we're not a Peter. And of the two, which is more dangerous—Judas or Peter?” And I think John is forcing us to consider these two stories in such a way that we might be terrified, and in a strange way, encouraged by the other. Let's take them by turns. Let's consider, first of all, this story of Judas—Jesus and Judas.

I. Judas

Let's look first of all at the section beginning at verse 17 where he begins to speak, “If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. I am not speaking of all of you. I know whom I have chosen, but the Scripture will be fulfilled. He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me. I am telling this now before it takes place that when it does take place, you may believe that I am He. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives Me, and whoever receives Me receives the One who sent Me.” And then He begins to say, “Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me.” Someone whom Jesus has chosen, in the outward sense; someone whom He has selected as a disciple as one of the twelve, as an apostle; that select band of people that included such names as Peter and John and Andrew and James and Judas—Judas Iscariot—he was one of the twelve. He was one of the apostles who had been with Jesus for upwards now of three years and heard His ministry and heard His preaching and seen the miracles--the mighty works, the signs, the symbols of His glory. He had seen them. And now in this thirteenth chapter, He had washed Judas' feet. He had divested His outer garments and wrapped a towel around Him and He loved Him, yes, He loved him enough to wash his feet. And inwardly, I think Judas despised and hated every single minute of it. His heart had long since begun to grow estranged to the ministry of Jesus.

And that's why Jesus forewarns His disciples, because to be forewarned is to be

forearmed. He says in verse 18, that this event will take place that Scripture might be fulfilled. Do you notice that? That this event of Judas' betrayal, this too is part of the fulfillment of biblical prophecy--that nothing happens--no darkness, no betrayal, no act of treachery, can take God by surprise. That far from the future being open and unknown to God, even this act of betrayal is known to Him. Nothing takes Him by surprise. But He knows the end from the beginning and He even knows this dark, dark deed.

Notice He goes on in verse 19, "I'm telling you this now before it takes place, that when it does take place that you may believe that I am He." That this event--yes, this event--not just the miracles and the signs and the wonders, but even the darkness of this event will manifest something of the identity of Jesus Christ. "That you may believe that I am He." In the foretelling of a dark, dark, deed, you will understand and recognize afterwards that I am He.

Notice, and I want us to focus especially on verse 21, that "After saying these things, Jesus was troubled in His spirit." And aren't those astonishing words? Here is the Son of God; here is the divine Messiah; here is the servant of the Lord; here is the Son of God; here is the Son of Man; and He is troubled in spirit. He is troubled emotionally and psychologically as the disciples watched Jesus in the upper room. They could have seen and noted the change of mood that overtook Him. That He was a man of like passions, that He was tempted in every point like as we are. Darkness and treachery troubled Him and betrayal troubled Him. That our Savior is not distant and aloof but knows where we are. It's a rare occasion; Jesus' soul here can be read in His face. John notes the deep-seated agitation, the unsettling of His spirit, that as our Lord thinks of the depths of human betrayal; as he plumbs now the darkness of Judas' soul, not only because He knew what Judas was about to do, but that it also, in a way, signaled the beginning of the end--that His time had come. This event, troubled as He was for Judas, troubled too because this was one of the things that would happen that would set in motion His own death and crucifixion. And He's troubled and He's agitated, and His soul is overborne now. What a wonderful astonishing Savior we have.

And He says to Judas, "What you are going to do, do quickly." And even in that, Calvin says, in even more astonishing words, I think, "Even in that Jesus was giving Judas a moment for repentance." Unthinkable as that is within the framework of our theology, hard as that is to understand and fathom within the restriction of biblical prophecy and the certainty of its fulfillment, yet, Jesus here is troubled on behalf of Judas. And look at those words at the end of verse 30, when he has received the morsel of bread and he goes out and "it was night." And maybe that is just a casual description of the fact that as you look out this window here or there, you can see the darkness falling, and John is just making a comment about the fact that it is now dark outside. And maybe John is saying something more significant than that. As Archbishop Temple once said that "These are some of the most pregnant words in the whole of literature." "And it

was night.” It was dark—not only outside. Not only because the sun had gone down, but it was dark in Judas’ heart. Because no light shone there, because no love for Jesus shone there, because sin had so taken a hold of Judas’ heart that it had begun now to strangle him. It was choking the very life out of him. And it was night.

There are all kinds of lessons in that for us tonight. The lesson that the difference between what appears on the outside and what is true on the inside. Now, don’t begin to think that if you’d been in this upper room when Jesus had given this prophecy, that one of them would betray Him, that they knew who it was. Because they didn’t. They didn’t immediately point to Judas and say, “I always knew it was him. I always suspected him from the very beginning.” They didn’t do that, because outwardly, externally, Judas’ profession of faith in following after the Savior, was on a par with all the other disciples. Now, I know that John has said on several occasions, beginning back in John 6, that Judas was a thief, that he was a lover of money, but John is writing that several decades after the event, but at the time he did not know that.

There’s a very simple lesson here: that there are devotions in our hearts, sometimes to other things, other than Jesus, as Judas was devoted to money, as Judas was devoted to the things of this world. You recall how he cried out when that expensive perfume had been anointed on Jesus’ feet, “that the money could have been used to give to the poor.” And John makes the comment that Judas was the keeper of the moneybag. There are devotions in our hearts to other things, other than Jesus, which if they lie unconfessed, and unmastered, will ultimately destroy us.

II. Peter

But then there is Peter, for there’s another prophecy here in verse 38. “I say to you, the rooster will not crow ‘til you have denied Me three times.” There’s a different atmosphere here. Judas’ story is weighted down by darkness and foreboding and inevitability. But what He says to Peter is different. What He says to Peter is surrounded by bright lights of promise and repentance and renewal and turning. It is as though someone has turned a spotlight on Jesus. He speaks, in the first place, of the impact they will have in their lives when they love one another. So long as Judas was there, He couldn’t have said that. It’s only after Judas has gone that He begins to speak of these things, and even in the context of Peter’s denial He can speak of those things.

But then, He says in verse 36, “Where I am going you cannot follow Me now.” There is a darkness that is about to befall our Savior, and He says to Peter, “You cannot follow Me now.” There is a place where I am going that you cannot follow, but you will follow Me after, He says, at the end of verse 36. And Peter will. And as we turn to the Acts of the Apostles, we see what happens to Peter, this Peter

who will deny Him three times, who will be so overborne by fear and timidity, that in a few hours from now, when Jesus will be arrested, and He's in the forecourt and a young girl recognizes his northern Galilean accent down in Jerusalem and says, "You too are one of the disciples," he will curse and swear that he has never known Jesus. But this Peter will turn, this Peter will change, this Peter will repent, this Peter, on the opening pages of the Acts of the Apostles, will become a thundering voice for truth and godliness and for Jesus, whose mouth cannot be stopped, who though imprisoned will say, "We must obey God rather than man." This Peter, who will be crucified upside down, on that road that leads out of Rome, possibly along with Paul the apostle, upside down at his own request because he felt himself so unworthy to be compared to his blessed Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

How does that account for Peter's denial, then? How could this magnificent apostle, how could he deny our Lord? There are two things. One, as the other gospels tell us more clearly than John does here, Satan. Because Satan is waking in the upper room that night. Satan is there. Satan had desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat," Jesus says. And it raises, doesn't it, a very important theological question. Why would God grant to the archenemy of souls, why would God grant any of his demands? And as soon as you begin to think about that question, you realize that it's part of a much larger question, "Why does God tolerate Satan's activity at all?" And you turn to Revelation 20, and those verses that describe the return of Christ at the end of this age, that "God will bind Satan for 1,000 years" - and forget about the question, "What does a 1,000 years mean," for a second and just think about the principle. That God is going to bind Satan so that he may deceive the nations no more. Then after a 1,000 years, the final victory will be God's and Satan will be cast into the lake of fire. Forever.

And you ask the question, "Why doesn't God do that now? Why doesn't God cast him into the lake of fire right now? Why go on century after century, permitting Satan to wreak this kind of havoc in the Church?" And don't tell me you don't ask questions like that. Those are some of the questions we ask all the time, "Why does God allow these things to happen?" And maybe the answer is, "I don't know." And maybe that's where we should stop, that "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, and those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children." And we must be content to live with the unknown and the unknowable and the incompressible, and maybe that's the answer. And maybe that's the test of faith. To walk hand in hand with God when He doesn't give you the answers, except that on the pages of the New Testament that appears to be a glimpse of an answer, on almost every page of the New Testament. That the connection, and hear this, the connection between suffering and faith is not simply a chronological one, but the connection between suffering and glory, as Jesus has been speaking about in regard to Himself, "Now is the Son of Man glorified," in the midst of this trouble, that the connection between suffering and glory is not merely chronological, but it is causal. That there is no path to glory except via the

pathway of suffering and trial, and many a Christian has discovered that on the other side of trial there is glory. There is a sweetness of glory to be tasted on the other side of suffering, and on the other side of battle with the evil one. There's one reason; Satan.

And there's another reason, Peter's astonishing trust in his own strength. Do you remember what Peter says, and only Peter could say this, "Though all should deny You, I will never deny you." And he meant it, I have no doubt but that he meant it. I have absolutely no doubt that he was sincere in those words, and the only thing that kept Peter from falling into the very abyss itself, along with Judas, were the words of Jesus, "But I have prayed for you." It is only the almighty power of God garrisoning Peter's soul that keeps him from descending into the abyss.

III. What is the difference between Peter and Judas?

Now, there is a question for you. As you walk through Jerusalem that night, Judas has already gone to do his dark deed, to get his 30 piece of silver, supposing you were to bump into Judas, and then bump into Peter, what was the difference between them? What was the difference between Judas and Peter? That's a good question, isn't it, because in a very real sense, John is giving us these two cameo portraits of two of the disciples, and he's saying, "You are either Judas or you are Peter." Do you understand that? You are either Judas or you are Peter. And Judas never felt a pang of guilt as to what he had done to Jesus. He felt plenty of remorse as to what he had done to himself, so much so that he would go out and hang himself, but he never felt one pang of guilt for what he had done to Jesus.

And at the end of the day, that's the only difference between them, that in Peter, in his denial, in his catastrophic failure, there were those tears of bitter repentance, that he had let the Savior down. There was a heart that was indifferent, and there was a heart that wept with shame because of the failure of his sin, and I rather think that John is highlighting these two, because he's saying to us, you are either a Judas, outwardly conforming to the patterns of discipleship, but inside in your heart there is no love for Jesus, there is no grasping hold of Him as your Lord, and Savior, and Prophet, and Priest, and King. And just as in Judas, so in your heart, there is darkness, there is deep, deep darkness. Peter failed too, he failed in a catastrophic way, and he failed publicly.

Don't you think Peter, perhaps even from heaven, has an urge to tear out these pages of the Bible that speak of his denial? No, I don't think so, not from the perfection of heaven, because along with the pages of his denial are the pages of Jesus' forgiveness. On the other side of Peter's repentance there is the warmth and the embrace and the love of Jesus for penitent sinners, because that's the

gospel. That's the gospel.

However catastrophic your sins may be, however public your sins may be, however full of shame you may be now as you think upon some of the things you have done, tears come to your eyes and perhaps roll down your cheeks as you think of what you've done to Jesus whom you love more than anyone else in the world. Are you a broken rock, cast upon the grace of Jesus Christ, saying tonight, "Not the labors of my hands can fulfill Thy law's demands. Rock of Ages cleft for me let me hide myself in Thee." Or perhaps you're saying with William Cowper, "Lord it is my chief complaint, that my love is weak and faint, yet I love Thee and adore, O for grace to love Thee more." Let's pray together.

Our Father in heaven, as we bow in Your presence tonight, conscious of the awesome possibility that we could be a Judas, outwardly conforming to the patterns of godliness but inwardly a heart that is unbroken, a heart that knows no shame for sin, a heart that is unrepentant, a heart that does not love You. Forgive us, we pray, and draw us to Jesus, for we pray in His name, Amen.

A Guide to the Evening Service

The Themes of the Service

Tonight's passage in the Gospel of John continues in the Upper Room. It focuses on what occurs immediately after the foot washing: the predictions of Judas' betrayal and Peter's denial. The failure of discipleship is one theme and the love of Jesus is another. Judas' betrayal took place after Jesus had washed his feet! The prediction of Peter's denial is followed by the reassurance of the priestly prayers of Jesus on his behalf!

The Psalm, Hymns and Spiritual Songs

In the Hour of Trial

We begin this evening's service with a hymn that focuses upon the High Priestly Prayer of Jesus. We ascend to the throne of God at the beginning of the service in order to find strength for what is to come: predictions of failure on Peter's part. "I have prayed for you," Jesus says to Peter; and it is this reassurance that enables us to keep going even when we have let the Savior down. Finding the resources to continue after failure comes from looking away from ourselves and to upwards to throne of Almighty God!

Arise, My Soul, Arise (RUF Song)

Another hymn which focuses upon the High Priestly Intercession of Jesus.

O Come and Mourn with Me Awhile

This hymn has been chosen because of the reference in verse 3 to Judas. The story of Peter and of Judas are interwoven in this account of John 13. It is important for us to know and understand precisely what it is that leads a man to do what Judas did: betray his Savior. We will sing it to the familiar tune, "As the Hart Longs."

The Sermon

How can we avoid being Judas when we know we are capable of doing what Peter did? That pastoral question is among the most important that we can ask. John Newton helps us with a another hymn (which we will not sing tonight!):

When Peter boasted, soon he fell,
Yet was by grace restored;
His case should be regarded well
By all who fear the Lord.

A voice it has, and helping hand,
Backsliders to recall;
And cautions those who think they stand,
Lest suddenly they fall.

He said, "Whatever others do,
With Jesus I'll abide;"
Yet soon amidst a murd'rous crew
His suff'ring Lord denied.

He who had been so bold before,
Now trembled like a leaf;
Not only lied, but cursed and swore,
To gain the more belief.

While he blasphemed he heard the cock,
And Jesus looked in love;
At once, as if by lightning struck,
His tongue forbore to move.

Delivered thus from Satan's snare
He starts, as from a sleep;
His Savior's look he could not bear,
But hasted forth to weep.

But sure the faithful cock had crowed
A hundred times in vain;

Had not the Lord that look bestowed,
The meaning to explain.

As I, like Peter, vows have made,
Yet acted Peter's part;
So conscience, like the cock, upbraids
My base, ungrateful heart.

Lord Jesus, hear a sinner's cry,
My broken peace renew;
And grant one pitying look, that I
May weep with Peter too.

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