

John 13-17: Living Life with an Invisible Savior

January 15th, 2023

John 13:18-30 The Comfort of Sovereignty

I. Recap

With the anticipation of His exaltation via the path of the cross, Jesus demonstrates His love for His disciples in full measure and to the very end of his time on earth. Jesus' imminent exaltation meant they would be left in the world without their Savior and King's physical presence. How will they worship and serve an invisible Savior? How will they know what to do without Jesus being physically present? In John 13:1-17, Jesus taught that the first thing believers need to do, those who have been spiritually washed clean by the LORD, is to humbly love fellow believers in the same way He loves us. The primary way we worship an invisible Savior is by humbly loving His people – by taking the lower role. The primary way we continue to experience the presence and love of an invisible Savior, is when believers supernaturally love one another.

II. Introduction

There are certain names throughout history that are connected to persons who have done terrible things which creates an unforgettable connection between the name and the evil act. For example, nobody wants to be known as a “Benedict Arnold” for his name is synonymous with betrayal. At one point during the Revolutionary war, Arnold held the position of major general and was trusted by General George Washington so much that he was put in command over Fort Clinton in West Point, New York. Upset at being passed over for promotion and seeking money to fund an extravagant lifestyle, Arnold set about deliberately sabotaging the American efforts and secretly plotting surrender to the British forces. Arnold was eventually made a Brigadier General in the British forces and led their soldiers into battle against many of the American troops he had once trained.¹

A less familiar, but equally terrible name is “Henry Philips,” for this man betrayed the protestant reformer William Tyndale. Tyndale had been a fugitive from the Church of England for twelve years because of his work translating the Bible into English. Philips, who had a gambling debt, was offered a large sum of money by church leaders to find Tyndale. Upon finding him, he befriended and earned Tyndale's trust. One day he lured Tyndale into a narrow passage where soldiers arrested him once Philips pointed out the fugitive with his finger. Tyndale was imprisoned for two years before he was martyred by strangulation, consumed with fire, and then exhumed so that his body could be blown up with gun powder.²

But no name carries as much baggage and derision as the name “Judas.” People don't even name their dogs “Judas.” Why? Because the greatest betrayal ever perpetrated, one of the most evil acts ever, was performed by Judas Iscariot. Even though he was one of the twelve disciples who had been with Jesus for three years, he plotted to hand his master over for a large sum of money.

1. What makes Judas' betrayal so shocking and treacherous?
2. Why does betrayal hurt so much?
3. What stands out to you about Jesus' response to Judas' betrayal? (cf. Mark 10:32)

¹ “Benedict Arnold,” October 27, 2009. <https://www.history.com/topics/american-revolution/benedict-arnold> Accessed January 12th, 2023.

² Steve Lawson, “Prince of Translators: William Tyndale,” Sept. 25th, 2017. <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/prince-translators-william-tyndale> Accessed, Jan. 12th, 2023.

John 13:18-30 The Comfort of Sovereignty

Even though Judas' betrayal was a terrible thing, it was all under the sovereign control and purposes of God. At any point Jesus could have thwarted Judas' plans, but he didn't, because they weren't just Judas' plans. They were the plans of the Father that would lead to Christ's exaltation and the salvation of sinners. As we will see in **John 13:18-30**, Jesus' wanted His disciples to know that what was about to take place was no accident, that He knew about the betrayal in advance, and yet, He was in complete control the whole time.

III. The Comfort of Jesus' Sovereign Choice

In John 13:10-11 we have already learned that Jesus knew Judas' betrayal was actively occurring, ***"10 Jesus said to him, 'The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you.' 11 For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, 'Not all of you are clean.'"*** Although Jesus knew this, the disciples had no idea someone was going to betray Jesus, nor could they have fathomed that it would be one of the 12 disciples! Up to this point in time Jesus has alluded to his betrayal, but he hasn't revealed the person yet. In John 13:18-20 Jesus begins to unmask the betrayer.

a. Text

"18 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.' 19 I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he. 20 Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me."
(John 13:18–20 ESV)

4. In verse 17, Jesus concluded his prior lesson saying ***"If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them"*** but then immediately follows it in verse 18 saying ***"I'm not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen"*** What two things does Jesus reveal to the disciples in verse 18?³

William Hendriksen helpfully paraphrases the connection between verse 17 and 18 this way, "If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. But not of you all am I speaking in holding out this prospect of blessedness. I know the ones I have chosen for myself to be my apostles. There is one who, though chosen, is not blessed. But as to the fact that I also chose him, this happened in order that the scripture may be fulfilled..."⁴

³ "Chosen" in this context refers to apostleship and not salvation. See John 6:70 for similar contextual use.

⁴ Hendriksen, 237.

John 13:18-30 The Comfort of Sovereignty

5. What temptation was Jesus preparing the disciples to face by unmasking the betrayer? How would Jesus' quotation of prophecy from Psalm 41:9 help with that?

“Importantly, not only did Jesus foreknow this event, it also fulfilled scriptural prediction (v. 18, citing Ps 41:9; reiterated in John 17:12). Like the thrice-repeated reference to Jesus' foreknowledge earlier in the narrative (13:2, 3, 11), this underscores God's (and Jesus') utter **sovereignty** and control over the entire set of proceedings.”⁵

“Jesus wanted to make sure that the rest of the disciples understood when the betrayal and arrest took place that He was not a surprise victim of Judas's treachery. They might wonder why He chose Judas, and how He could have so completely misjudged his character. Therefore the Lord clarified His earlier declaration that the disciples were spiritually clean (13:10). However He did **not speak of all of them**; in His omniscience (cf. 2:24-25) “He knew the one who was betraying Him; for this reason He said, ‘Not all of you are clean’” (v. 11)—only **the ones** whom He had **chosen** (cf. 15:16).”⁶

6. Verse 19 Jesus said, *“I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he.”* Why does Jesus spend time telling announcing his betrayal?
7. Jesus wants the disciples to believe “that I am He”⁷ which is an allusion to Exodus 3:13-14: *“13 Then Moses said to God, ‘If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?’ 14 God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM.’ And he said, ‘Say this to the people of Israel: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”* What is the significance of Jesus' allusion to Exodus?⁸
8. In verse 20, Jesus says *20 Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me.”* How does this give fuller meaning to His claim to deity?

“Only Jesus' resurrection and exaltation and his gift of the Spirit would utterly clear their minds and answer their questions, but the careful groundwork Jesus here lays proved sufficiently strong to keep the disciples together. They did not scatter immediately after the crucifixion, but kept together until his resurrection fully vindicated him and established their faith.”⁹

⁵ Andreas J. Köstenberger, *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters* (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI, 2009), 237.

⁶ MacArthur, 75.

⁷ Some Bible translations (NASB, NIV, KJV, NET) note that the pronoun “He” in the phrase “I am He” is not present (which aligns with the Greek) rendering the verse simply “that I am.”

⁸ See also Is. 43:10; cf. John 6:35, 41, 48, 51; 8:12, 58; 9:5; 10:7, 11, 14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1, 5; 18:4-5

⁹ Carson, 471.

John 13:18-30 The Comfort of Sovereignty

IV. The Comfort of Jesus' Sovereign Love

a. Text

“21 After saying these things, Jesus was troubled in his spirit, and testified, “Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.” 22 The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he spoke. 23 One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was reclining at table at Jesus’ side, 24 so Simon Peter motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. 25 So that disciple, leaning back against Jesus, said to him, “Lord, who is it?” 26 Jesus 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. 27 Then after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, “What you are going to do, do quickly.” 28 Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. 29 Some 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. 30 So, after receiving the morsel of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.” (John 13:21–30 [ESV](#))

9. After announcing a betrayer in their midst Jesus experience severe mental and spiritual distress. According to verse 21, Why was Jesus troubled in His spirit?¹⁰ What does this reveal about Jesus’ relationship with Judas?

“Several things **troubled** the Lord; His unrequited love for Judas, Judas's ingratitude for all the kindness He had shown him, the malevolent presence of Satan, who would shortly possess Judas ([v. 27](#)), the fearful fate that awaited Judas in hell, and the knowledge that the betrayal would lead Him to the cross, with its sin-bearing ([2 Cor. 5:21](#)) and separation from the Father ([Matt. 27:46](#)).”¹¹

“It was the bitter sorrow of seeing a chosen apostle deliberately becoming an apostate, a backslider, and an ungrateful traitor. That it was a foreseen sorrow from the beginning we need not doubt; but sorrow is not less acute because long foreseen.”¹²

10. According to verse 22, the disciples had no clue who the betrayer could be. Why didn't the disciples suspect that Judas was the betrayer?

The table the disciples were sitting at was not a long rectangle as depicted in DaVinci's painting “The Last Supper.” Instead, it was often a u-shaped table, sitting about a foot off the ground, where the guests would recline on pillows, leaning on the left arm with feet pointed away from the head of the table, and where the host would sit at the head of the table with seats on his immediate left and right which were considered places of honor.¹³

¹⁰ “son of perdition” John 17:12; Matt. 27:3-5

¹¹ MacArthur, 77.

¹² Ryle, 22.

¹³ Morris, 625-626.

John 13:18-30 The Comfort of Sovereignty

John was reclining or leaning on Jesus during the supper and so Peter gestured to him to ask Jesus who the betrayer was. Jesus indicated who it was by giving Judas a special morsel of the unleavened bread dipped in a bowl of fruit puree – a mixture of dates, raisins, and sour wine known as “sop.”¹⁴ This was considered a special honor and the fact that Jesus handed it to Judas meant he was close by to Jesus in place of honor.

11. Why did Jesus identify Judas through this honorable gesture, rather than just whisper to John “It’s Judas”? (cf. Matt. 5:43-45; John 13:1; 1 Tim. 2:4)

“And thus the sign of Judas’ treachery was, at the same time, an expression of offered friendship: it amounted to an offer of friendship at the last moment.”¹⁵

12. Since the disciples were still confused about who the betrayer was after Jesus gave the bread to Judas, what does that indicate about how Jesus communicated his answer to John?
13. Why did God ordain that one of Jesus’ closest disciples should betray him instead of a mob taking him prisoner? (cf. Heb. 2:18; 4:15)
14. In verse 27 John tells us something he could have only learned after Jesus’ resurrection – that Satan entered into Judas. Under his direct control, Satan used Judas to betray Jesus. Does this fact exonerate Judas? Why or why not?
15. According to the following verses, what were Judas’ motivations for betraying Jesus?

“4 But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, 5 “Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” 6 He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it. 7 Jesus said, “Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. 8 For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me.”” (John 12:4–8 ESV)

“14 Then one of the twelve, whose name was Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests 15 and said, “What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?” And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. 16 And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him.” (Matthew 26:14–16 ESV)

16. Why did Satan want to kill Jesus? (cf. Heb. 2:14-15; 1 Pet. 1:10-12)

¹⁴ Carson, 474.

¹⁵ Charles Ross, *The Inner Sanctuary: An Exposition of John Chapters 13-17* (The Banner of Truth Trust: Carlisle, PA, 2016), 36.

John 13:18-30 The Comfort of Sovereignty

Jesus, now no longer just speaking to Judas, but to Satan also, tells him tersely, “what you are about to do, do it faster.” This continued to show how Jesus was not a victim but was in control the entire time. Even Satan is on Jesus’ time table and under His sovereign command.

17. What makes the sovereignty of Jesus comforting to us in our lives today?¹⁶

18. What lessons do you suppose the disciples might have learned from how Jesus handled this betrayal? How would it prepare us for a life of following Jesus?

V. Conclusion

After receiving the final offer of friendship, Judas immediately left to do what God had sovereignly ordained for him to do – to initiate the death of Christ for sins of the world by means of his betrayal. The text ends with what seems to be an innocuous statement - “and it was night” but this statement is more than a reminiscent memory. Not only had literal dark descended upon the land, but the power of darkness. But through what would amount to be the greatest evil deed every committed, the crucifixion of the Son of God would bring about the greatest good ever possible. No one saw it coming. God’s ways are not our ways, but His ways are perfect. Though we may not know why God brings us through difficult circumstances, we can trust in and find comfort in His sovereign purposes.

“Judas demonstrated that there is nothing sinful men can do to thwart the sovereign will of God. Out of the seeming tragedy of the cross came the triumph of redemption; Satan's apparent victory was in reality his ultimate defeat ([Heb. 2:14](#); [1 John 3:8](#); cf. [Gen. 3:15](#)). God used Judas's treachery for His own glory (cf. [Gen. 50:20](#)).”¹⁷

The writer of Hebrews summarizes the main application of this passage of scripture well in 13:5b-6,

“5 for he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”

6 So we can confidently say, “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?”

Main point: We can find comfort in the midst of any evil circumstance confidently knowing Jesus is in complete control and that He will work it out for our good and his glory.

¹⁶ Gen. 50:20; Rom. 8:28-30; Rom. 5:3-5; 1 Pet. 4:12-13; James 1:2-4

¹⁷ MacArthur, 82.