

John 13:18–30

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[0 : 00] It's a joy to be together this morning. And this morning we are embarking on a text that I have never heard preached.

And so this will be my first time hearing it preached. So let's just pause to pray together. Father, we come to you and we ask for your help.

We ask that you would illumine your word before us, that your Holy Spirit would move among us, that you would fashion us into the likeness of your beautiful son, the Lord Jesus.

Help us to this end, we pray. We ask these things for Jesus' sake. Amen. Well, it's titled The Last Supper. It's certainly one of the most recognizable pieces of art in the Western world.

Painted by Leonardo da Vinci in the late 15th century, is housed in a convent in Milan, Italy. The meal is one of the most iconic scenes in all of the Gospels, for all the Gospels recorded.

[1 : 05] And from the meal, all of Christendom, Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, derived their perpetual meal of communion. In assembling the sermon, I did a little reading on the painting.

I learned that da Vinci, in the piece, attempted not only to capture the meal, but to capture a particular moment in the meal. The precise moment after Jesus uttered the words that he would be betrayed.

Da Vinci's notebooks allow us to identify each disciple and where they were seated. It also allows us to understand the emotions he was trying to capture in that picture.

Surprise, anger, confusion are all observable responses in the iconic piece. Da Vinci gave us the artistic interpretation of the event, but this morning, we are given the insider's experience of the event.

Namely, from the vantage point of the Apostle Paul, most certainly the one whom the text mentioned as the disciple whom he loved, in verse 23. He didn't just leave us an artistic rendering of the event, but he leaves us with the eyewitness testimony regarding it.

[2 : 24] John, incidentally, gives more attention to the betrayal than the other Gospel writers. And this morning, my hope is that we will see specifically that betrayal will not deter the saving plan of God.

Betrayal will not deter the saving plan of God. The schemes of men and evil will not impede God's intention to save. As we'll actually see this morning, betrayal commences God's saving plan.

It actually begins Jesus's glorification. I'm going to navigate our text into two parts this morning. First, we will see betrayal predicted in verses 18, 19, and 20.

And it will be followed by betrayal permitted, verses 21 to the end. Two things, two signs that will navigate the road ahead. Betrayal predicted, and then betrayal permitted.

Betrayal is predicted from verses 18 to 20. Linking up with the previous text preceding our passage, it comes on the heels of the most divine, lavish gesture.

- [3 : 45] For John, this meal was remarkable in that his Lord had demonstrated his love during the meal, where the Bible tells us that he rose from supper.
- He laid aside his outer garments. He took a towel. He tied it around his waist, then poured water into a basin, and began to wash and to wipe the disciples' feet.
- It was customary for hosts to offer this for their guests in those days, but to come from the hands of the Lord Jesus, depicted a greater cleansing that would be achieved through Jesus's impending death.
- John wants us to know that Jesus was not merely cleaning feet. He would clean them from their fallenness. He was not only cleaning the soil on their feet.
- He would shortly clean them from the sin in their hearts. It was an extraordinary act for the Son of God, for he would give up his very life to accomplish it.
- [4 : 47] The betrayal of Judas is arguably the most well-known act of betrayal in contemporary culture. It's an entrenched in American culture, and connotes only negative ideas, phrases such as betrayed with a kiss, or kiss of death, or the Judas kiss have all emerged from this biblical account.
- Judas's actions have resulted in his name being seemingly forbidden from being taken. As I was researching this sermon, I visited a popular name website, baby name website, and I keyed in the name Judas, and I was met with this response.
- Judas is currently not ranked on the baby name's popularity charts. So you and I have negative associations with the name, and if you followed along with us in the book of John, he has left us similar hints about Judas.
- From at least the sixth chapter, he has already disclosed to you and I that there was an enemy within. In a previous foot washing ceremony in chapter 12, he is called a thief.
- And here in John chapter 13, there's an intensification that Jesus would be rejected, and it would be demonstrated through the sinful scheme of betrayal.
- [6 : 12] At the dinner already, it's been mentioned twice. You see it in chapter 13, verse 2. During the supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him.
- Again mentioned in verse 11. The air must have been thick in that room. A celebratory Passover meal was taking place.
- It was hosted by Jesus himself. It was a meal that was consumed to commemorate what God did for his people. And all the while, during the celebration, Jesus was being prepared as God's ultimate Passover lamb, being prepared for slaughter.
- So for the third time in this chapter, John isolates the individual. Who would not be counted among the disciples. This is actually the first time verbally in the gospel that Jesus expresses there's a traitor among them.
- Up to this point, it's been passing comments that John the narrator has left. But this is the first time that from Jesus's very lips, that he says there are some who will not experience the blessing promised in verse 17.
- [7 : 35] There are exceptions. The individual is unnamed at this point, but you and I know very well who Jesus is speaking of. And Jesus cites from the Old Testament in verse 18.
- He speaks of an individual who was foretold by the Old Testament. He cites the words of King David from Psalm 41. Because King David was actually, he was no stranger to betrayal.
- We don't know exactly when King David penned this psalm, but he was betrayed on multiple occasions, whether from multiple sons who tried to seize his throne, or Israel's priest who tried to displace him.

David was betrayed on multiple occasions. Israel's anointed king was betrayed. And here, once again, Israel's anointed king is betrayed.

He would fall into the schemes of sinful men. The verse gives us a vivid picture of a close friend partaking in an intimate meal and bearing the strike of a lifted heel.

[8 : 44] We are to imagine a raised hoof that belongs to a horse, ready to strike, preparing to kick. This is the picture of betrayal.

Jesus predicted his betrayal. Jesus foretold his faith. The text makes it clear why he said these things.

He said, I'm telling you this now before it takes place, that when it does take place, you may believe that I am he. In sharing his betrayal, he is trying to bolster the belief and the confidence of his disciples.

Now picture this. The disciples are about to go through tremendous testing. You and I know, but they have no idea. The days ahead of them would be so dark that Peter will be left denying his association with Jesus.

Another disciple, Thomas, will disbelieve all that has transpired in the previous three years. The next few days, they will be scattered.

[9 : 54] They will be embattled. They will be cast into despair. For three years, they have walked with Jesus. Three years, they have fashioned their identity with Jesus.

Three years, they have cultivated the hope that Jesus would be, restore the glory of Israel. And they will soon undergo a weekend that dismantles all of this.

And it is in anticipation of this, that Jesus sits them down and tells them how it will unfold so that when the time comes, they may believe.

When the time comes, they are to recall Jesus as being the only one who knew. They are to recall that Jesus exercises divine omniscience.

Who can possibly forecast the future? Who knows the beginning from the end? Really, only God. There is none like him, Isaiah tells us.

[11 : 00] Only Jesus can disclose the plans and the purposes of God. The saving plan of God would not be thwarted by the sinful scheme of betrayal. The mission would not be aborted because there's a conspiracy in the inner ranks.

The fact that there is a mole on the inside would not deter the objective. Jesus is telling the 11, Judas's inclusion up to this point is not some divine oversight or mistake.

It is not. We should not imagine that God or Jesus has taken a quiz and he only got 11 out of the 12 right. No, our God is not a 92% test taker.

He does not have 92% success rate. He has a perfect success rate. Jesus knows those who are his. And he is able to keep and to guard all those according to the language of the text that he has chosen.

It is not as if Jesus did not know. And so when the time comes and your faith is tested, he is telling the disciples, be assured and be strengthened that I have, I am who I have always said I am.

[12 : 25] And here's the tenderhearted nature of Jesus. He is working to preserve their faith.

If he would do this for the 11, he can certainly do this for us, for you and I.

Jesus knowing what would bear down upon his disciples, gives them words to bolster them up when the day comes.

Jesus is giving them a word. I'm giving you a word for the purposes of your upkeep. You see, for you and I, our faith is bolstered in the same way.

The words of Christ are preserving words for a faith community that is in battle. In these COVID days, the words of physicians, epidemiologists, leaders are valuable and informative.

- [13 : 32] Before the embattled believer, we are looking for words from the great physician, the great healer, the true king.

We turn to these words because in them we are assured and sustained. There is enough in this book that can keep you. There are enough promises in this book to hold you.

There are enough glimpses of the future to preserve you. And in the same way that Jesus gave a word to the disciples for their preservation, he has given us his word for our well-being.

The disciples specifically needed to know that Jesus would be betrayed, but they were not to lose their faith. Rather, they were to increase their faith and confidence and certainty in that Jesus was who he established himself to be.

The betrayal has been predicted by Jesus. And now in verse 20, he begins to set his disciples up for their ongoing ministry. Their ministry would be one of reception.

- [14 : 55] As they receive him, they would receive the one who sent him. And in a few chapters, Jesus would commission his disciples to the world.

They would receive their stripes as the apostles or the sent ones. They would become extensions of the very Lord Jesus. So much so that those who exercise reception toward them would demonstrate reception of Jesus himself.

And as Jesus completes verse 20, in conveying reception, his spirit is now troubled in verse 21. Because he himself knew that reception would not be universal, but would be accompanied by rejection.

So up to this point, we've seen a betrayal predicted. And from this point on, we will see a betrayal permitted. Permitted. Jesus, again, in verse 21, openly states that he will be betrayed.

Taking the truly, truly formula, or in the King James Version, the verily, verily formula, he reinforces his prediction at the meal that he would be betrayed.

- [16 : 05] Perhaps the most surprising thing about this narrative sequence is the contrast between the certainty of Jesus and the cluelessness of the disciples.

Jesus has attested to his betrayal. But the disciples are clueless. They had no idea who it could possibly be, where it may emerge from.

Apparently, Judas had blended in well. He had disguised his discipleship so well that the other 11 did not even know the unfolding ploy.

And the narrative lets us know this twice. Because after Jesus discloses his betrayal, again, in verse 22, the disciples look at one another.

They're not sure what he means. They're not sure who he's talking about. And so the text tells us that one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, certainly John the writer, as he's lying next to Jesus, reclining next to Jesus and sharing the meal, he gets this motion from Peter.

- [17 : 21] I don't know what the motion was. It may have been like a head nod. But Peter relays to John and says, hey, John, figure out who this guy is.

And so Jesus gives him the answer. Jesus answers in verse 26, it's whom I give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it. And after he dipped the morsel, he passes it to Judas.

It's an identifying act. But even after this identifying act, they're still uncertain. They're still a bit confused.

Because following this act, Jesus commands or instructs Judas to go ahead and do what he's planning to do.

But the text tells us no one knew why Jesus said this to him. I mean, you can imagine this group of 13, 12 disciples and Jesus for the past three years have probably seen each other every day.

[18 : 43] They certainly fought. We know that the gospel accounts for them arguing who's greater. They certainly have seen each other's worst and best.

They certainly couldn't fathom that a betrayer would be an insider. But here he is.

The one who was arguably the most trusted. The one who is the money handler for the 12. The one who was to give to the poor when Jesus instructed.

Was the betrayer. The cluelessness of the disciples is so peculiar. Perhaps John wants to vindicate the 11 others.

Showing clearly that Judas is the only, had no accomplices. He was an independent actor. Regardless, the disciples enter into the weekend unaware of the cosmic magnitude of the next few days.

[19 : 53] Though the text conveys the cluelessness of the disciples, the apparent focus of 21 to 30 falls on the disclosure of the betrayer. It's enunciated in verse 26.

As Jesus resumes the role of host at this meal. He serves the morsel to Judas. He has already served the disciples by washing their feet.

Now he serves them by providing them food. In this act, Jesus demonstrates profound love. Love directed not only to the 12, but love to Judas in particular.

He embodies the very words that he commands. We are to love our enemies. Or to borrow the language of the Apostle Paul. When you see your enemy hungry, you feed him.

Thirsty. You give him something to drink. Jesus' last act toward Judas, once again, is an extension of grace.

[20 : 52] And with this very act, the passing of the morsel, the instruction to go out and start the plan, Jesus commences the next phase of the planned mission of redemption.

Jesus, in this episode, permits Judas to betray him. The taking of the morsel is the fulfillment of the foretelling in verse 18.

So now that what has been predicted is now being permitted, what you are going to do, go do quickly. And in this statement, Jesus initiates the next phase of his mission.

The text shows us that Jesus is in complete control and command of his own fate. Nothing will happen prematurely. Nothing will happen unexpectedly. It happens accordingly and fittingly.

No one takes Jesus' life. He lays it down on his own accord. He has the authority not only to lay it down and to take it up.

[22 : 03] We see that. If he chose not to give up his life on the cross, death would have no right and no power to take it.

We are to see that this is the mission of God. The plans were laid from eternity past and carried on through the present and will continue into the future.

It was God's foreknowledge and it's etched into these pages. We are not to believe that these wild or uncontrollable circumstances led to the demise of some Jewish peasant preacher.

We are to see that God has ordained and orchestrated the death of his son. Judas would not have been permitted to commence the next phase if it were not for Jesus giving him permission.

Death would not be able to take his life on the cross if it wasn't for his willingness to lay down his life. Listen.

[23 : 04] Listen. Jesus is not a victim in the crucifixion. Death, hell, and the devil are victims.

Jesus is the victor for he bears all authority in heaven and willingly gives his life for many. In the cross of Jesus, heaven humiliates hell.

And here we have it. The plan is commenced. Judas is seen as complicit with the devil. The thoughts were sown in verse 2.

The actions were shown in verse 27. Judas had experienced the foot washing. He had eaten of the meal. He had been counted among the 12. And yet betrayal emerges.

So Judas abandons the table. Abandons the fellowship. And he abandons the life. If Judas demonstrates anything for you and I, it's certainly a warning.

[24 : 12] The warning that proximity to Jesus does not necessarily produce faith in Christ.

Proximity to Jesus does not necessarily produce faith in Christ. The great dread is becoming Judas.

It is better to be a disciple unaware of all that following Jesus means than to be an unbending, unrelenting bystander harboring an unrepentant spirit.

Judas shows us that it is possible to taste the goodness of God and be torched in the fires of judgment. It is possible to sample the love and the generosity of God and then be lost to his divine displeasure.

It is possible to be among God's people. Partaking in the faith community. Enjoying its benefits.

[25 : 19] And be faking it. Often. Often. So often. I have heard. Well, being I grew up in church. And I've been in church a long time. Years upon years upon years upon years. I did it all. Incidentally, I took communion.

I was baptized. I hung out. I went to youth group. I did all the things. That. That. That. That. That. That. That. That. and I've been in church a long time, years upon years upon years upon years.

I did it all. Incidentally, I took communion. I was baptized. I hung out. I went to youth group. I did all the things. And then, despite doing all of that, I didn't realize I was not a Christian.

You see, there is no greater dread than this, that perhaps there are some in the distance of hearing my voice that you have heard about Jesus' life.

You have read about Jesus' death. You have heard about his resurrection and its savings effects. But like Judas, could it be possible that you are an individual who denies his cleansing?

[26 : 47] It's horrific. There is no poorer choice in life that you can make than rejecting the saving work of the Lord Jesus. Be forewarned.

In Judas, we see that God's cleansing work will be rejected by some. Yet there is great hope.

There is also great hope offered in this episode. Because betrayal will not deter God's saving purposes. Truth be told, no sin is too great or too dark for God to save.

But the light shines and the darkness cannot overcome it. You see, it comes to the end of this chapter or to the end of this section.

And it almost seems as if John doesn't know how to process the reality that Judas would walk out on them.

[27 : 48] He seems lost for words in this episode because the episode ends very tersely. And it was night.

It almost seems that John doesn't know what to say or how to say it. C.S. Lewis has been recorded saying that this single phrase is the most unforgettable in all of literature.

Why? Well, it's certainly factually true. It was nighttime and dark. But there is more in this ominous phrase than simply the marking of time.

The darkness in which Judas exits certainly foreshadows his dark deeds, depicts his moral condition, introduces the darkness in which the narrative is headed outside this Passover table.

Judas is mobilizing the forces of darkness. More appropriately, according to verse 2 and 27, the devil and Satan are arraying an army and lining them up in formation.

[28 : 58] And in contrast, in this little room, you have 11 disciples unaware of the infantry that has surrounded them, clueless to the impending events.

I comically envision a small flock of sheep grazing and unbeknownst to them, packs and packs of wolves are descending upon them.

They continue to graze and drink when all of hell is about to storm the gates of heaven. The tension in this text is great.

The ominous clouds are overhead and the remaining shelter, the remaining 11, have found shelter in the light and the love of a shepherd who will lay down his life for his sheep.

The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. Father, we come to you and the tone of this text is heavy and weighty.

[30 : 24] It ends with darkness because the next unfolding chapters are filled with darkness trying to drive out the light and yet we know that the light shines.

And so, Father, I pray for us as we reflect and ponder and consider that we would be reminded that there is no darkness too great that the light of the Lord Jesus cannot drive out.

Accomplish that work in us, we pray. We ask these things for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.