

The best laid plans

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[0 : 0 0] Luke chapter 22, reading the first verse. Now the festival of unleavened bread called the Passover was approaching, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for somewhere to get rid of Jesus, for they were afraid of the people.

Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the twelve, and Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus. They were delighted and agreed to give him money. He consented and watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present. Then came the day of unleavened bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed.

Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover. Where do you want us to prepare for it? they asked. He replied, As you enter the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you.

Follow him to the house that he enters, and say to the owner of the house, The teacher asks, Where is the guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples? He will show you a large room upstairs, all furnished.

[1 : 1 0] Make preparations there. They left and found things just as Jesus had told them, so they prepared the Passover. When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table, and he said to them, I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer, for I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.

After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, Take this and divide it among you, for I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.

And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, This is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way, after the supper, he took the cup, saying, This cup is a new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.

But the hand of him who is going to betray me is with mine on the table. The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed, but woe to that man who betrays him.

They began to question among themselves which of them it might be who would do this. A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be the greatest. Jesus said to them, The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who exercise authority over them call themselves benefactors, but you are not to be like that.

[2 : 3 4] Instead, the greatest among you should be like the younger, the youngest, and the one who rules like you, like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves?

Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. You are those who have stood by me in my trials, and I confer on you a kingdom, just as my father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat, but I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail, and when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.

But he replied, Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death. Jesus answered, I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me.

Then Jesus asked them, when I sent you without purse, bag, or sandals, did you lack anything? Nothing, they answered. He said to them, But now if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag.

[3 : 4 5] And if you don't have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one. It is written, and he was numbered with the transgressors. And I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment.

The disciples said, See, Lord, here are two swords. That's enough, he replied. Amen. Amen. Many of you, I'm sure, will know, I think I've said it before, I'm a big fan of playing board games. If you've been in my study, you'll recognize that. You can see them arrayed around the shelves. And if you haven't been in my study, well, do drop in sometime. You're welcome to come and have a chat. We can talk things through.

Maybe we'll even play a game. But it'd be great to have those opportunities to chat. Our door is always welcome. But anyway, board games. When you play a board game, the first step of what you need to do, you need to understand the rules.

Okay? What actions are possible? The mechanics of the game. Step two, you think through a plan. If I want to be able to do that on my next turn, well, I need to do this now.

[4 : 56] But if you want to actually be successful at playing a game, if you want to win the game, to beat the other people, then you have to think beyond your own plans. You have to think also about what everyone else is going to do.

What is your opponent planning? What's he likely to do on his next turn? How can I be ready for it? How can I counter his plans? How can I thwart his strategies whilst protecting my own?

You have to look at what other people are doing as different plans are being made. And that's what's going on here in the start of Luke 22. We've got two different plans being made. We've got one set of strategies laid out and another set of plans alongside it.

One plan made by the religious authorities and the other plan, Jesus' own. And the question Luke presents us with here in chapter 22 is which of these plans is going to succeed?

Who will gain the upper hand? Whose strategy will be robust enough to withstand how the others might respond? So verses one through six, we've got this plan being made by the chief priests and the teachers of the law and then joined by Judas.

[6 : 05] The first couple of verses of the chapter, nothing's really changed from what's gone before. The last section of the gospel, we already saw the religious authorities looking for an opportunity to do away with Jesus.

And they're still keen for that now. But they're also still held in check. They're unable to do what they want to do because of their fear of the popular outcry.

They're afraid of the people. They worry that they'll lose their position if people see them acting against this popular teacher. And no doubt that fear, that check, is increased by the presence of the crowds flocking to Jerusalem.

We're told here the festival of the unleavened bread called the Passover was approaching. So Jerusalem's population is swelling and all of these people act as a check on the religious authorities.

So they want rid of Jesus, but as best as they can tell, this is not the right time to do it. They can't see a way ahead for them. But suddenly everything changes.

[7 : 10] Judas comes to them. Judas comes with an offer to betray Jesus. And understandably, they're delighted. They agree to pay Judas. And he then starts to watch for the best opportunity when to summon them to make the arrest.

Now, they know the crowds are still going to find out sooner or later. But the reaction of those crowds is going to be far less acute when they hear about it as something that has already been done than if they watch the temple authorities handcuffing Jesus and leading him away.

It's less acute when it's less immediate. So their plan is now in place. With a man on the inside, they can be sure the opportunity is soon going to come. And indeed, it will.

Now, we've thought before about the motives of the religious authorities. Their comfortable positions of authority being threatened by somebody outside of their nice, neat power structures. So we know why they want rid of Jesus.

But what about Judas? Why does Judas turn traitor? It's interesting, isn't it? We don't mind so much, do we, when people are openly at odds with one another.

[8 : 23] An honest declaration of war between two nations is one thing. Operating as a soldier in uniform, it's honorable. Even when you're on different sides of the conflict, you can respect one another. But it's a very different thing, isn't it, to betray those who trust you.

Julius Caesar, he's not terribly surprised by the general conspiracy against him. But the inclusion of the one he counted as a friend is very troubling to him.

Think about the members of the rebel alliance fleeing to Cloud City only to find that Lando-Carisian has sold them out. They've been betrayed by the friend that they trusted.

And these famous betrayals, whether real or imagined, they are as nothing compared to the betrayal that we find here in Luke 22. Judas is one of the inner circle.

Judas has been with Jesus for years. He's listened to Jesus' teaching. He's seen these miraculous healings. He's seen Jesus' love and care and compassion.

[9 : 27] And he betrays him. For what? For money. 30 pieces of silver, Matthew tells us. Enough to be significant.

Not really that much money. Estimates vary, but the largest I found, roughly equivalent to \$3,000. It's not a lot of money to betray a friend, is it?

Little wonder that Paul calls the love of money the root of all evil. Avarice. Greed. These are some of the most effective weapons that Satan uses to corrupt those who profess faith.

The love of money is the root of all evil. Think about Elisha's servant, Gehazi, led astray by his desire for money.

Ananias and Sapphira, lying to the Holy Spirit. J.C. Ryle says, Of all proofs, there is none so melancholy as the one before us.

[10 : 30] For money, a chosen apostle sold the best and most loving of masters. For money, Judas Iscariot betrayed Christ. Made Christ. Money's such an alluring master, isn't it?

Money can master those who have lots of it, and it can master those who have very little. We can be consumed by our love of it as we hold on to what we have, or consumed by it as we bemoan what we lack.

And we might say to ourselves, Well, we would never go to such lengths as this. Of course we wouldn't. But even without these kinds of extremes, there's much harm that is done to ourselves and done to others when we're captivated by such a love.

We'd do well, wouldn't we, to examine ourselves, to pray the words of Psalm 139, and search me, God, and know my heart. Show me the truth of what is within me.

Test me. Know my anxious thoughts. Friends, if Judas, who'd been journeying with Jesus for years, Judas who gave every appearance of being a committed disciple, if Judas was drawn astray by money, then we should be humble enough to take care lest we too fall.

[12 : 01] Alongside this, there's a second dimension to Judas' decision to betray Jesus. Verse 3 tells us that Satan entered him. The devil himself has entered the fray.

This plan to see Jesus betrayed, this plan to see Jesus killed, this isn't just a product of the minds of wicked men. Now, alongside that fact, this plan is of diabolical inspiration.

Satan is at work. And I think that should prompt us to consider a couple of different matters. First, we have to recognize that the overall, the sense of the understanding of the cosmos that Luke presents us with here, this picture of what reality is really like, that we're required to consider not just the world of our senses, not just what our eyes can see and our ears can hear, but also the world of the supernatural.

Luke is very clear about the reality of this world beyond what we can understand, for good and for evil. Paul writes, our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

We have to recognize this reality. The same devil is still at work today. The powers of this dark world, the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms, these are realities with which we must reckon.

[13 : 48] It's so easy to forget about this dimension of the world in which we live, isn't it? It's so easy to be focused on what is immediately before us. It's so easy to act as if this reality that we touch were all that there is.

It's easy to act as if the only forces opposed to us were those of wicked men, people who we can see and understand. But that is not the full picture.

And that means, that means we can't afford to fight in our own strength. If all that were opposed to us were a boss whose priorities are different to ours or the wicked leader of another nation or somebody wanting to oppress us with their own strength, if that were all that stood against us, then we would have a chance, wouldn't we?

We'd be able to fight back. We'd be able to withstand their attacks. But that's not all that is arrayed against us. We cannot fight in our own strength.

The forces of evil are stronger than you. You do not have the power to resist. We cannot withstand them.

[15:12] And therefore, we must, our only hope, is to depend on the strength of the one who is not just a little bit stronger than the powers of evil, but the one who is infinitely stronger than all of the forces of evil combined.

When we recognize that that is where our battle is, then we know we need that strength at work within us. Friends, we should be calling daily on God for his strength to withstand the reality of these attacks.

There's another aspect to consider of the fact that Satan's at work. See, we have to ask if Satan is at work.

If Satan has entered in, then how is Judas responsible? If Satan entered him, and then after that, he went and he took action to betray Jesus, well, how is Judas to be held responsible at the judgment seat of God?

Surely he's not morally responsible if he's been overtaken by the evil one who is stronger than he is. You can't blame him for being coerced into doing wicked things.

[16:34] Not so. That isn't the true picture. As R.C. Sproul puts it, he says, Satan found a willing companion in Judas.

Satan didn't coerce Judas to perform that act. They were partners in crime. Judas acquiesced willingly from the darkness of his own heart.

He didn't need to have Satan possess him. He was happy for that occasion. Yes, Satan was at work, but not without the willing cooperation of Judas himself.

We can't make arguments like this to absolve ourselves or anyone else of responsibility before Almighty God because God knows perfectly the motivations of our hearts.

He knows the corruption of our nature. He knows the evil that is within us. Ready, eager to cooperate with the suggestions, the temptations of Satan and his minions.

[17:42] No one is ever forced into sin. We choose it of our own free will. Judas chose it. And since the days of Adam, all of us have.

God sees. God knows. God knows the things that are we cannot absolve ourselves in such a way. We need a better absolution. So Judas is making his plans.

But verse 7 and following introduces us to another set of plans. This time, plans made by Jesus himself. And in these verses, Jesus is making plans to share the Passover with his disciples.

So he sends Peter and John into the city, sends them with this slightly strange, convoluted plan that they're going to go and meet a man who's carrying water and so on and so forth. And like with the man whose donkey was borrowed a few chapters ago for the first arrival into Jerusalem, we're left not quite sure whether Jesus is directing his disciples to a prior arrangement that he's already made or whether this is kind of divine foreknowledge at work.

It may well be that Luke intends us to see this as evidence of supernatural power, but there is at least a plausible explanation. It is at least possible that Jesus has made this secret arrangement and he's told this man in Jerusalem to be watching out for two men coming at around this time.

[19:08] A man carrying a water jar, that's what Peter and John are told to look out for. A man carrying a water jar isn't so unheard of as to draw undue attention, but it is suitable as a sign, more so than you might think, because men don't carry water jars.

The women carry water jars. Men would carry skins of water. So it works as spycraft, if you want to call it that, a subtle sign that's distinctive but not so outlandish as to take particular note.

So it's at least plausible that this is kind of a deliberate arrangement. But we're still left wondering, well, why these convoluted arrangements in the first place? Why does Jesus not just say to Peter, go to house number three on Straight Street?

Well, I'm inclined to agree with Dale Ralph Davis theory. He says that Jesus is deliberately avoiding revealing his plans in advance. He doesn't want Judas or any other listening ears to know where he's going to be.

Why? Well, because, yes, Jesus knows he's headed for the cross. Jesus knows that his plan, his objective, is to die on that cross, to provide the absolution that we need.

[20 : 21] He knows he's headed there. But he intends to arrive there at the correct time and no sooner. He wants there to be this time with his disciples in the upper room.

He wants the time to pray. The last thing he needs is the temple guards bursting through the door late this evening to arrest him. There aren't going to be protective guards at that point. It's an entirely possible time that they could arrive. If they know where he is, they could easily come and arrest him at that point. So he's avoiding that eventuality. We can't be sure that's the reasoning. But it certainly fits with the fact that Luke is clearly presenting everything in these chapters as proceeding according to plan. Everything happens exactly the way Jesus wants it to happen. Everything happens the way Father, Son, and Holy Spirit decided before the dawn of time it would happen. Remember back in chapter 9 of his gospel, Luke recounts Jesus saying the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

[21 : 33] Given the symbolism that Jesus is going to explain in the following verses, given this recasting of the Passover, clearly the timing of Jesus' death at Passover, this is God's timing.

So Jesus explains verse 16, the Passover is now finding its fulfillment. Remember the Passover festival, this dates back to the days of the Exodus. God's people rescued from slavery in Egypt by God's mighty power at work, the ten plagues and all of that.

God's people rescued from his own destructive power as the blood of the Lamb daubed on the doorposts caused the angel of death to turn away. The Passover is a reminder of God's rescue from Egypt and God's rescue from his own wrath, his rescue from death.

So the Passover, this Passover to the Jews means deliverance from Egypt into Canaan, this Passover is now going to be filled with its full meaning. The Passover transformed into the Lord's Supper and from now on pointing people not just to deliverance into the land of God's promise but deliverance, the most comprehensive deliverance that there could possibly be.

Deliverance from sin, deliverance from death into everlasting life in the presence of the King of Kings. The Passover is transformed. We're going to think about more about the Passover and the Lord's Supper in due course.

[23 : 02] I want to come back to this theme of preparation. I think we're given a contrast here between two different disciples as we see these plans being made.

On the one hand you have the obvious disciple, the well-known disciple, Judas, a member of the inner circle, one of the chosen twelve.

And Judas says in his heart, what can I get? How much money can I gain for myself? Judas asks, what's in it for me?

Judas. And on the other hand you have this anonymous disciple, presumably a resident of Jerusalem, who instead of asking what can I get, asks what can I offer? What do I have?

I have a room. I have a place that I can make available to the master. He arranges suitable furnishings, all ready for the teacher to eat the Passover with his disciples. What could be more wonderful?

[24 : 05] What could be more appropriate than to be an unnamed, unknown disciple, willing to give whatever you have? What could be a higher honor for him than to have the teacher eating as his guest?

In contrast between these two disciples. But the bigger contrast, the bigger theme, is these different sets of preparation. Satan has made his plans. The chief priests, Judas the betrayer.

Satan's pieces are arranged. His strategy is set. Jesus' plans are less dramatic, aren't they?

They look a whole lot less impressive. They don't look like they're going to amount to much. I mean, with friends, observe the festival along with countless other people in the city this year.

A walk in a garden. For so much of this process, for so much of it, it seems that Satan has the upper hand.

[25 : 08] It looks like Satan is on the path to victory. That Jesus is falling into his trap. That this ambush that Satan has laid is going to succeed. The traitorous heart of Judas.

It's this key playing piece in this cosmic game of chess, isn't it? Satan knows what is at stake in victory here. And it all turns on the actions of one man.

A paltry sum of money. A quiet garden. And a kiss. And yet, precisely these carefully laid plans, precisely what Satan has set up according to his own plans, as Satan thinks he's being so clever, he looks at his pieces arrayed across the board and thinks nothing can prevent my victory.

The betrayer is going to act. The soldiers are going to come. The spineless ruler will be pressured into a sentence that he knows is unjust, but can't be bothered to reject. The plan is coming together. And yet, that plan will have the exact opposite effect to that which he intends. Because God's infinitely superior plan is also in place.

[26 : 28] you see the opponent's plan and you think about how to counter it, how to stop it succeeding, what to set in place to stop that plan happening.

But this is even more than that, isn't it? It's not preventing your opponent's plan from flowing through. It's not even preventing that plan from achieving its end, achieving its objective. objective is so much greater than that. It's taking that plan, letting it run through entirely, and by your opponent's own plan, achieving your objectives.

What Satan thinks is strengthening his hand is in fact playing into God's. You see what we mean when we talk about God being omniscient?

He knows all things. perfectly. He knows the results of every conceivable course of action. He knows what is in the heart of every person.

[27 : 37] He knows exactly what everyone will choose to do. He knows what path Satan is going to take. And so our omnipotent God can take a traitorous disciple and a spineless ruler and a fickle crowd, the best pieces that Satan has to deploy, God can take those same pieces, those same ingredients and produce precisely the result that he intends.

The salvation of many souls. The salvation of you and me 2,000 years later. All because God set it up exactly as he intended.

Is that not awe-inspiring? God, we serve who does such things. Let's pray. Lord God, we rejoice that you always achieve exactly that which you intend.

That nothing can hinder you from achieving your plans, from accomplishing your objectives. Nothing can hinder you from saving, whether by many or by few. We rejoice that you are the omnipotent one.

Lord, give us the humility to deliberately choose to align ourselves with your objectives, to delight to fulfill your plans, that we might be those who rejoice to see your intentions coming to fruition, that we might be useful servants of our master.

[29 : 18] To your glory and your praise. Amen.