

0300

The sun and the match

John 13:18-30

Context

We're in John chapter 13 this morning. It's the Last Supper, on the eve of when Jesus was crucified. In this passage, he's pointing forward to his betrayal which would come through Judas. With where we are in John 13, Jesus has just finished washing the feet of his disciples and we pick up as Jesus is speaking to the group.

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."

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.

Prayer

Introduction

In Saratoga National Park in Eastern New York, there's the Boot Monument, which was erected in 1887 to honor one of the great generals of the early part of the Revolutionary War.

An inscription on the monument reads:

"In memory of the "most brilliant soldier" of the
Continental Army who was desperately wounded on this spot the sally port of
BURGOYNES GREAT WESTERN REDOUBT

7th October, 1777

winning for his countrymen the decisive battle of the American Revolution and for
himself the rank of Major General."

The general had also helped lead a victory in the battle of Ticonderoga in 1775 and had put together one of the first naval fleets in America's young history.

His name?

Benedict Arnold.

And before he became infamous for his betrayal of the American cause in attempting to surrender West Point to the British, he had been one of our greatest generals.

And I tell that story for this reason.

Sometimes it can be hard to separate a person from the moment that made them infamous.

With that, we come to our passage in John 13.

Bridge

And we're going to look at this passage in three scenes today.

And three words I have to summarize those scenes are: anticipation, speculation, revelation.

And with that, we'll get right into our text.

Anticipation

Verse 18, Jesus is in the middle of speaking:

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.'

Everything that Jesus is saying is all part of the divine plan.

All four gospels mention Jesus foretelling his betrayal.

When Jesus says that he knows whom he has chosen, it is that he knows who he has been chosen to be his true disciples.

And then he goes into explaining why his betrayal is fulfillment of prophecy.

the Scripture will be fulfilled, 'He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.'

Psalm 41

Jesus is quoting from Psalm 41.

That Psalm was written by David. If you know your Old Testament, then you know that David was the great king of Israel. He slew Goliath. He was the man after God's own heart. He wrote more of the Psalms than anyone else. He was a direct descendent of Jesus.

But his life is not without its many difficulties. But one of the most striking is that David has a son named Absalom who teams up with one of the royal advisors in an attempt to overthrow King David.

And in Psalm 41:9, David is lamenting this attempted betrayal at the hands of those close to him.

**⁹Even my close friend in whom I trusted,
who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me.**

Jesus quotes that verse because the same thing is about to happen to him.

Jesus knows what it's like to be betrayed by one close to him.

Application - betrayal by one close

Borrowing an idea from Richard Phillips in his commentary on John. When someone close to us betrays us, betrays our trust, it is absolutely devastating.

The betrayal of trust of a parent to their children can leave emotional wounds from which a person never fully recovers.

There's the bitter pain that a spouse endures when the one who has vowed to be faithful and to forsake all others is unfaithful in the marriage.

There are siblings who have exploited the close family ties for their own gain.

There are betrayals in close friendships.

I've seen family members who have had business partners cheat them.

Sadly, there are even betrayals that happen in the church. And those harms can be devastating to a person's faith, to their walk with God, and to their ability to trust the church.

I'm sure that many of us here today have had a point in our lives where someone close to us really hurt us, or abused our love, friendship, or trust.

Used our goodwill against us.

That's a difficult thing to endure. It hurts.

And this doesn't erase the pain, but it's important to remember that we have a savior who entered into that. In being man, in being human, he too had relationships with people. And he too was betrayed by one close to him.

There's no excusing betrayal. I'm not trying to mitigate the sins one person commits against another.

But in the times when there's a temptation to hold onto bitterness, or contempt, or hatred, to also remember that we have a savior who was gracious in the face of his great betrayal.

Verse 19. Jesus is continuing to speak.

Verse 19:

¹⁹ I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he.

Jesus talks of his betrayal, and the reason why he foretells his betrayal is to inform the disciples.

When he is betrayed, his role as the Christ is in no way diminished. The divine plan is in no way thwarted.

Judas did not turn the ministry of Jesus upside down. It was all according to plan.

Jesus is the prophet who points to the fulfillment of prophecy and he's the savior who's betrayal had been foretold by the prophets.

Jesus says that he's telling them what will happen so that - quoting the text now - **when it does take place you may believe that I am he.**

Now that's a very interesting statement.

You may believe that I am he.

Without getting too much into the Greek, the more literal translation of what Jesus is saying is **you may believe that I am.**

And those last two words are packed with theological meaning. **I am.**

It goes back to Exodus 3 when God speaks to Moses at the burning bush. Moses asks God for his name and the Lord responds with **I am.**

God is pure being and existence.

In John's Gospel, Jesus makes numerous I am statements. I am the bread of life, I am the good shepherd, I am the light of the world, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

Jesus makes those statements to point to his own divinity.

And so in today's passage, Jesus wants his disciples to believe that he is the **I am.** When the prophecy is fulfilled and Jesus is betrayed, and his disciples see this all unfold, and they see that Jesus knew about it all along, that they will believe that Jesus is Lord.

Verse 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."

Here Jesus is preparing the disciples for when he's gone.

Jesus is going to be betrayed. His time with the disciples is limited. Even after Jesus is raised from the dead, that time with them is also going to be short. And so he's telling the disciples that when he's gone, receiving the disciples will be

tantamount to receiving Jesus because receiving Jesus is tantamount to receiving the God who sent him.

So that's our first scene. Jesus has talked of his betrayer.

And he's alluded to it before in this gospel.

But now he's talking about it on the night when he is going to be betrayed.

And so the first scene is the anticipation for the betrayal.

It's quite likely that the disciples don't realize how imminent this betrayal is.

And that leads us into our second scene.

Speculation

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."

Jesus now explicitly tells the disciples that he is going to be betrayed.

But again, we don't see any indication that the disciples know how imminent this betrayal is. It'll be later that same evening.

It's also not certain if they grasp the weight of what Jesus is saying. It's not that one will slip up and somehow betray Jesus. It's not that one of them will inadvertently betray Jesus.

But that Jesus will be deliberately betrayed.

Verse 22:

²² The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he spoke.

Verse 22 is important.

Because I think when we imagine this scene, it's tough to not imagine this like a movie.

And in the movie, it's the last supper. They're at the table. Jesus says "One of you will betray me" and it's almost like we expect the camera to shift over to Judas.

And the music to change.
Dun. Dun. Dun.

And you see Judas, and the actor even looks a little bit evil.

It wasn't like that.

The disciples have no idea.

They're looking around, uncertain, trying to figure out who Jesus is speaking of.

In Matthew's Gospel, when Jesus foretells his betrayal, Matthew adds:

²² And they were very sorrowful and began to say to him one after another, "Is it I, Lord?" (Matthew 26:22).

They wonder if they themselves might unwittingly be the betrayer.

At the beginning of our time, I talked about Benedict Arnold and the reason for that is it's illustrative of a point. With Arnold, it's very easy to forget Benedict Arnold, the successful major general and to only remember Benedict Arnold, the man who betrayed America.

With Judas, it's easy to forget Judas the disciple and only remember Judas the man who betrayed Jesus.

My point isn't to build up the character of Judas. My point is that it's not like he's walking around during the ministry of Jesus and the other disciples see this dark cloud hovering over Judas.

He's one of the guys.

In Matthew 10, Jesus sends out the 12, including Judas.

Matthew 10:1:

he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction.

Judas was in that group. He was gifted.

John 12:6 mentions that it was Judas who had been in charge of the money bag.

Yes, the passage also mentions that Judas was stealing from that money, but the other disciples didn't know that at the time.

Having charge over the money shows a certain level of trust. You usually don't pick the person you trust least to be your treasurer.

Judas was one of the group.

And there's another piece of information in the passage which I think shows us why Judas would have been the last person the disciples would have guessed.

I'm going to read these verses as a unit and then we'll look at them one by one.

Verses 23-26:

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.

Few things to note about those verses

First. Unless you've ever studied the background of the last supper, you're probably picturing it wrong.

History - Triclinium

I think the natural inclination is to imagine the scene of this meal like how it would look if a group of people were eating a meal today.

Jesus and the disciples sitting together at one big table.

In Renaissance artwork, most famously, Leonardo Da Vinci's painting called "The Last Supper," we always see the image of Jesus sitting at a long table with the disciples all around him.

These depictions are most certainly not what the arrangement was.

The Roman custom was to sit in an arrangement known as a Triclinium. And that fact is not a useless piece of trivia, but is actually relevant in this passage.

In a triclinium, you have multiple tables which are low to the ground and arranged in a U shape. And there was a hierarchical structure to the seating arrangement. The central table is where the three most prominent people sat, with the most prominent person seated at the middle spot.

Instead of sitting at a big table on a nice wooden dining room chair, you're sitting on the ground or a pillow and you're leaning on the table. The gospels translate it as "reclining." I always think of reclining as leaning back, as one would do in a recliner. But they're actually more leaning on their side.

The standard was, you would sit at the table on your left side and eat with your right hand.

All of this is relevant to understanding the scene.

Because verse 23 gives an indication about where the Apostle John is sitting.

²³ One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was reclining at table at Jesus' side,

Brief side note. John never refers to himself by name in his own gospel. He always refers to himself as one whom Jesus loved.

He's not saying that out of pride or boasting. Actually, it's the opposite. He's not saying, "I, John, am so important in the ministry of Jesus."

He's almost losing himself in the story. He's saying that the main thing that should identify him is as someone whom Jesus loved.

And that should be true for all of us.

That should be the central, most important aspect of our lives. It should be the focal point of the Christian identity.

To be known by Jesus.

Not who we are, not who our family is, not where we went to school, not how much money we have. But that we are loved by Jesus.

And that should be the part of our lives that is most clear to the world. Are relationship with Jesus.

So John isn't trying to boast, but because it's relevant, he alludes to where he's seated.

The ESV says that John **was reclining at the table at Jesus' side.**

And the word to focus on is "side."

If you're imagining the scene like they're all sitting at one big table, it's easy to think that the passage is simply saying that John was sitting next to Jesus.

That's not how it worked.

Jesus is leaning into the table and John is lying down next to Jesus, also leaning into the table.

The word that is translated as “side” in the ESV, in the Greek, more literally means that the disciple is sitting at Jesus bosom or breast.

So Jesus is leaning on his left side, John is to his breast which places John to the right of Jesus.

Hold that thought as we continue in the passage.

Verse 24:

²⁴ so Simon Peter motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking.

Something else we learn. Peter is not sitting at the main table.

Back to the scene. Jesus has dropped the bombshell that one of them will betray him. Clearly everyone must be wondering who Jesus is talking about when he says that one of them will betray him.

Peter is always the one who speaks up in the gospels.

But verse 24 doesn't say that Peter asks Jesus who he was speaking of.

Verse 24 tells us Peter motioned **to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking.**

In other words, Peter motions to John - who's sitting next to Jesus - to ask Jesus.

Verse 25, John obliges Peter.

²⁵ So that disciple, leaning back against Jesus, said to him, “Lord, who is it?”

Again, notice the closeness of their proximity.

Leaning back against Jesus.

In our modern world, that would be an absolutely awkward seating arrangement. But that was the custom in the first century Greco-Roman society.

John is next to Jesus and he asks **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.

Once again, it’s not a movie.

When Jesus does this, there’s no soundtrack that suddenly switches to ominous music.

To anyone looking, it appears that he’s just given Judas a piece of bread.

We’ll see as we continue that the other disciples do not understand the significance of what just happened.

But when we read the story, I think we imagine that everyone heard what we just read.

But they didn’t.

John hears what Jesus said. Because John is right next to Jesus.

But not everyone else is.

Except for John. Except for John and...

Judas.

At least, that’s the view of most scholars. That Judas is the other person at the table of honor.

And I think that view is what makes the most sense of the story.

And I think that’s further reason as to why Judas would have been the last person the disciples would have expected.

He was gifted, in charge of the money, and seated at the table of honor at the left hand side of Jesus.

But Jesus shows Judas he knows who he really is.

He knows who all of us really are.

Judas might have fooled the other disciples.

You might fool people in a church, you might fool people in your own family.

There's no fooling the Lord.

The antidote to that is faith. Believing in the Lord. Loving the Lord. Walking with the Lord.

Illustration - wolves in sheeps clothing

Just because someone is in the Christian community does not mean that they're in the family of God.

Just because someone is in a church, or a small group, or knows the Bible does not mean that they know the Lord.

In Matthew 7, Jesus warns the disciples.

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. (Matthew 7:15)

There have always been, and will always be those who prey upon the church for their own gain.

Again in Matthew 7, Jesus warns the disciples when he says:

²¹ “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ ²³ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’ (Matthew 7:21-23)

There are those who infiltrate God's church, not out to worship, not because they're curious about God, but because they're at war with God.

Never be shocked when people fall. We can be saddened. But don't be shocked. We live in a fallen world.

There are very few people you truly know.

I'm not saying to be cynical and untrusting of the world.

I think of high profile ministry leaders who fall from grace.

It can be easy to talk the talk, and a person can be very talented and gifted, all the while using those tremendous talents for selfish motivations.

Revelation

Third scene. We see Judas set himself against Christ.

²⁷ Then after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, "What you are going to do, do quickly."

Judas betrays Jesus and it is demonic, but Judas is still responsible for his own sin and rebellion against the Lord.

The bread that Jesus gives to Judas is meant to be a symbol of hospitality and fellowship as they celebrate the Passover.

But Judas is set to betray Jesus.

The other disciples are oblivious to all this, and we see that in verse 28.

²⁸ Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him.

They don't know what's going on.

But the Apostle John knows. Because John is sitting right there.

He's given a front row seat to the betrayal of Jesus.

When Jesus tells Judas in verse 27 to do what he must do quickly, Jesus is showing that he's still in control, he knows what Judas is up to.

Verse 29 shows us that the disciples didn't know what that meant.

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.

They think that Jesus has told Judas to move quickly in order to run an errand.

And that misunderstanding among the disciples is the reason why they're still aloof when Judas leaves the dinner.

Judas is not leaving to serve Jesus. He's leaving to betray Jesus.

And Jesus know it. But the other disciples don't suspect a thing.

The passage ends on a simple, but ominous note.

Judas leaves in a hurry.

³⁰ So, after receiving the morsel of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.

It was night.

Light and darkness is a major motif in John's Gospel. Jesus is the light of the world. The fallen world is in darkness.

In John 12:35, Jesus talks about how the light was with them for a little while longer. John 12:46, Jesus says that he has come into the world as a light so that whoever believes in him may not remain in darkness.

That's the last time light is mentioned in this gospel and it's contrasted by Judas departing in darkness.

Yes, it's also night time when Judas leaves, but the greater mood that John is setting is that it was night in the sense that it was the darkness of humanity and the human soul that was conspiring to forever darken the light of the world.

There was now no stopping Judas from betraying Jesus.

Conclusion

I keep mentioning that Judas served with the disciples, that he was gifted. I do that not to minimize his betrayal of Jesus. But I do that because it can be so easy to look at Judas like he's almost some inhuman species.

Like he's on such another stratosphere of evil that we can't possibly relate to him.

But when we do this, and act like Judas is so different from us, we make his part of the passion story something that we can't learn from.

There's an idea I appreciate from the psychologist Jordan Peterson. And it's this idea that man is capable of tremendous evil.

We look at bad people and think that they're so much worse than us, but we're just as capable.

We look at Nazi Germany and think that they were so much worse than us, that we could never do those things.

It's easy to think we're better than others and that the evils of others are just so inherently worse than anything we could do.

That gets us off the hook.

We can play the comparison game.

But what is it that makes you incapable of doing horrible things to others?

Just because you behave?

Peterson argues, and I think that he's right, that we cannot begin to understand our capacity for good without understanding our capacity for evil.

It's easy to think we're good, that we're capable of doing good things.

But what about evil?

Are we just so good that we can't do horrible things to others?

Of course we can!

We're fallen people in a sinful world.

We're sinful and rebellious.

Everytime we willfully sin, it is an affront to the almighty God of the universe. Everytime we sin, we're exercising our own pride in saying we know better than he does.

We find ways to ignore the Lord.

We turn from his light and follow darkness.

We turn to other things besides God for our sources of fulfillment and joy.

We can be bitter towards others, self-righteous, controlling, manipulative.

We sin against the God of the universe.

I said a moment ago that we cannot understand our capacity for good without understanding our capacity for evil.

And it is also true that we cannot understand the greatness of God's grace without understanding the depths of our sinfulness.

That we are great sinners, but Christ is an even greater savior.

That we are in darkness, but Jesus is the light.

That we are dead in sin, but Jesus invites us to eternal life.

And that apart from Christ, we're just as lost as Judas.

And just like with Judas, Jesus invites us to his table.

Judas walked away from it, into the darkness.

But we have an opportunity to respond to the light. To believe in Jesus. To embrace his grace. To know the forgiveness that he offers and to live lives not for the world but for the Lord.