

37. Betrayal

In our study of the life of Jesus, we are still at the eve of his death, the night when he was arrested by messengers of the religious leaders of the Jews. Today we will see by what means these messengers were able to find and take Jesus without the crowds of ordinary Jews who loved him interfering to prevent his arrest. It was by such an unworthy and terrible act that its author's name, Judas, is synonymous even today with the word "traitor." But this disloyal and totally reprehensible act is another factor which shows the great love of Jesus.

WHAT DID JUDAS DO?

To better understand what happened, we need to back up a little, to two days before the Jewish Passover. Luke 22:1-6 tells us this:

"Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called Passover. And the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might kill Him, for they feared the people. Then Satan entered Judas, surnamed Iscariot, who was numbered among the twelve. So he went his way and conferred with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray Him to them. And they were glad, and agreed to give him money. So he promised and sought opportunity to betray Him to them in the absence of the multitude."

The Gospels of Matthew and Mark give us another detail. They specify that Judas sold Jesus for the sum of 30 pieces of silver.

Later, during the last meal Jesus had with his disciples, Judas was with the disciples as usual. When they were lying around the table, each leaning on his left elbow and using his right hand according to the customs of the Jews at that time, Judas was even sitting in a place of honor, at the right hand of Jesus where the Lord could talk to him in private. During the meal, Jesus announced that one of them would betray him to those who wanted him dead. We read in John 13:21-30:

"He was troubled in spirit, and testified and said, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me.' Then the disciples looked at one another, perplexed about whom He spoke. Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved. Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask who it was of

whom He spoke. Then, leaning back on Jesus' breast, he said to Him, 'Lord, who is it?' Jesus answered, 'It is he to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it.' And having dipped the bread, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. Now after the piece of bread, Satan entered him. Then Jesus said to him, 'What you do, do quickly.' But no one at the table knew for what reason He said this to him. For some thought, because Judas had the moneybox, that Jesus had said to him, 'Buy those things we need for the feast,' or that he should give something to the poor. Having received the piece of bread, he then went out immediately. And it was night."

Some time later, Jesus and the others left the place where they had eaten the Passover. They went out of the city of Jerusalem and traveled to the Mount of Olives. They went into one of the private gardens found there. The Gospel of John tells us: "Then Judas, having received a detachment of troops, and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, came there with lanterns, torches, and weapons" (John 18:2,3). Mark continued the story:

"Now His betrayer had given them a signal, saying, 'Whomever I kiss, He is the One; seize Him and lead Him away safely.' As soon as he had come, immediately he went up to Him and said to Him, 'Rabbi, Rabbi!' and kissed Him. Then they laid their hands on Him and took Him." (Mark 14:44-46)

WHAT MAKES HIS ACT SO REPREHENSIBLE?

So here is how Jesus was betrayed and delivered into the hands of those who wanted to kill him. It was a particularly wicked and condemnable act. Jesus used these words to speak of it: "He who dipped his hand with Me in the dish will betray Me" (Matthew 26:23). In this verse, Jesus refers to a prophecy in the Psalms which was about to be fulfilled: "Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me" (Psalm 41:9).

In the Middle East, the act of eating with someone was a sign of friendship or an act of loyalty. When a man who had eaten at the table of a person, declaring his friendship in this way, afterward turned against this person, it was a very bitter thing. Psalm 55:12-14 well explains the feeling of the person

betrayed in this way:

“If it were an enemy insulting me, I could bear it. If it were my enemies attacking me, I could hide. But it is you, the one so close to me, my companion, my good friend, who does this. We used to share our secrets with one another, as we walked through the crowds together in God’s Temple.” (Easy-to-Read translation)

Jesus knew well what was in the heart of Judas, but he never treated him less favorably than the others. On the contrary, until the end he showed him signs of love which should have touched Judas’ heart. Sometimes by trusting someone who does not deserve it, we can affect that person and encourage him to act better. So Jesus allowed Judas to carry the common moneybag for the apostles. He already knew that Judas was going to sell him out to the priests, but he washed his feet as he did the others. Judas received a place of honor, beside Jesus at the last supper. Jesus gave him a piece of bread dipped in the dish from which they ate, another sign of favor among them. But it is when he received the piece of bread that Judas left to commit his act of treason.

According to Matthew 26:14-16, Judas took the initiative of going to the chief priests, and he is the one who said to them, “What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?” Judas loved money. When Mary, the sister of Martha, anointed Jesus’ feet with an expensive perfume, Judas said, “Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the moneybag; and he used to take what was put in it” (John 12:5,6). He stole from the moneybag of his friends because he loved money and apparently he sold his master for the same reason. This was not an act motivated by a spiritual concern. It was not an act of passion motivated by a sudden anger or strong fear. It was a premeditated crime.

Finally Judas put the topping on his wickedness by the way in which he identified Jesus for his enemies. He kissed him, always an action of a friend. He kissed him with a greeting of respect. But it was a mockery.

DID JUDAS HAVE A CHOICE?

Are we too hard on Judas? Some say that Judas’ action was necessary for our salvation. If he had not betrayed Jesus, the Lord would not have died for our

sins. But, Let us remember that even though God is able to make all things to work together for the good of His chosen ones, even the sinful actions of rebellious men, that does not excuse those sins.

In the Old Testament, the brothers of Joseph, filled with hatred and jealousy, sold him as a slave. He was then taken to Egypt and resold. But God was with Joseph and raised him to a position of great power in Egypt, and through him all of his father’s family, including his wicked brothers, were saved from famine and death. The brothers’ action in selling him was no less guilty, but God used that action. In the same way, God used Judas’s wicked deed, but that does not reduce his guilt.

Others say that Judas did not have a choice... that he had been predestined to commit this act. The prophecies had to be fulfilled. But God does not predestine our actions. He decided in advance how he would bless his children. He decided in advance that it would be through Jesus Christ that salvation would be granted. But He did not determine before the foundation of the world that this person would be lost and that one would be saved, that this person would commit a theft and that one would be faithful to his wife, and that it would be Judas who would betray Jesus. Otherwise there would be no sense in a last judgment, and God would be unjust to hold us responsible for acts that He Himself caused us to commit.

However Judas will be punished for his act. Jesus said clearly, “The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born” (Matthew 26:24). So it is important to make the distinction between predicting and predetermining, between foreknowledge (knowing something in advance) and predestination. Knowing these things, God, in His Word, predicted certain events. He knew in advance what would happen. But He did not order these things to occur, and He doesn’t oblige anyone to do wrong.

Others say that it was Satan who forced Judas’ hand. Luke 22:3,4 says that Satan entered into Judas, and he went and conferred with the chief priests. In John 13:27,30, it also says, “Now after the piece of bread, Satan entered him... Having received the piece of bread, he then went out immediately...” Evidently Satan had a role in the betrayal of Jesus by Judas

Iscaiot. But we cannot say that this relieved Judas of his responsibility for what he did.

In Acts 5, we have the story of a man named Ananias. He agreed with his wife, Sapphira, to sell a piece of property but also to lie about the price that was obtained. Then he brought, as a gift to the church, part of what they received for the sale, indicating that it was it was all the money received. They had the right to keep part of the money, but they wanted the church to think that they were more generous than they were. In reproaching him, the apostle Peter said to Ananias, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself?... Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God" (Acts 5:3,4). Peter attributed this sin to the presence of Satan in the heart of Ananias, but also to the fact that Ananias had put into his own heart this dishonest plan.

In the same way we can point out that the Holy Spirit lives in the heart of a faithful Christian, but this does not force the Christian to always do the right thing. He must cooperate with the Holy Spirit and exercise his own free will to avoid committing sin.

CONCLUSION

We have already seen that Jesus treated Judas with love and consideration to the end. Yet he knew what Judas was thinking of doing. Other people would have been made bitter by this disloyalty. They would even have abandoned the mission of saving such creatures, telling themselves that men do not deserve such a sacrifice. And this is true. We are not worthy of it. We are rebellious, self-centered, ungrateful and deserving of punishment. But the love of God is so great that Jesus did not turn away from the cross, even in the face of such a clear demonstration of the sin of man. When Judas left to find the men who would arrest Jesus, John tells us that it was night. Jesus is light, and when a man turns his back on Jesus, it is always night. Such a man plunges into darkness. Judas topped off his sinfulness when, leading an armed mob, he betrayed Jesus with a kiss. He showed to what extent the wickedness of man could go. But Jesus showed the extent of His love for men in going to the cross anyway.