

Betrayal and Prophecy

Matthew 26:47-56

Sometimes we overthink things, especially the things of God that seem to contradict our immediate sense of reason and logic. For example, the relationship between the decrees of God and the sinful acts of men. The common question is this, “Did God decree, did God foreordain the sinful acts of men?” Or to use the most provocative word, did God predestine the sinful acts that we do as human beings?

The overthinking goes something like this. If God did do that, then God is the author of sin, so they say. To which I always immediately think, if God didn’t do that, if the sinful acts of men are ungoverned and entirely removed from any sense of God’s power of sovereignty, then God is not God! And the Bible is not true. Further, more personally, our lives would then be ruled by fate, by chance, as we would be constantly threatened without protection by the evil acts of sinful creatures all around us. What a horrible and desperate situation that would be!

If God isn’t in control, if God isn’t the one who knows everything that will come to pass because he ordained everything that comes to pass according to the counsel of his own will, then he is not God! And our situation really is hopeless. But this we know about God and the salvation that is promised to us in Christ, that our salvation, our inheritance, our adoption as the children of God, comes about...

Eph. 1:5 “...according to the good pleasure of His will.”

Paul continues in that chapter, again with reference to our eternal inheritance, but broadens the whole concept of God’s purpose and decree.

Eph. 1:11 “In Him also we have obtained an inheritance,

being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will.”

So God “works all things according to the counsel of His will.” Does that include the evil acts of men? Well, if he works “all things according to the counsel of His will,” then all things would have to include the evil acts of men. But does that, then, make God the author of sin? Does that remove the responsibility of sinful men for their sinful deeds? Well...of course not. And rather than overthink the whole thing, let me give you an example to prove the point I am seeking to make. The example is Judas.

Our text this afternoon is all about Judas. The evil of Judas. It is all about his evil, wicked betrayal of Jesus. And, it is all about God bringing to pass exactly what he planned and purposed all along, from before the foundation of the world. So if Jesus wasn’t betrayed, if he wasn’t put to death, then the prophecies of Scripture wouldn’t be fulfilled! And God would be a liar. So as we’ll see more closely in a few minutes, Jesus says to Peter when he tried to defend Jesus and resist Judas,

v.54 “How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?”

To say the same thing positively,

v.56 “But all this was done that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.”

So it must happen in this way! It is necessary for this evil act of this evil man to take place, because God had said that it would! It will happen just as God decreed. Yet, God is not the author of sin—sinful men are responsible for their own sin. But God’s eternal purpose and decree has determined the certainty of everything that comes to pass, including those sinful acts of sinful men. So we don’t need to overthink the whole matter to assume

that means that he is the morally responsible agent who is the author of that sin.

In that same context, before we look at Judas more personally, consider what Peter preached on the great day of Pentecost, words of evangelism intended to show forth the wicked sinfulness of those who put Jesus to death.

Acts 2:22 “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know— 23 Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death.”

Jesus was “delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God.” And sinful men are guilty of that great sin they committed. Consider also what Peter and John said not long after the great miracle of Pentecost. These words are addressed to God himself, quoting first from Psalm 2. I am reading from,

Acts 4:24 So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: “Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, 25 who by the mouth of Your servant David have said: Why did the nations rage, And the people plot vain things? 26 The kings of the earth took their stand, And the rulers were gathered together Against the LORD and against His Christ.’

The Apostles then apply that great Psalm to their own situation, continuing,

Acts 4:27 “For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together 28 to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done.”

So don’t overthink it. Just read the words of Scripture with faith. And believe them. God anointed Jesus to be the Messiah, the Christ. And the world conspired against him to kill him, to do, as Peter and James say, “whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done.” So the conclusion is this,

v.56 “But all this was done that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.”

What must be fulfilled here in our text this afternoon? Well, evil. And what we see in our text is,

I. EVIL PERSONIFIED.

In the person of Judas Iscariot.

A. The person of Judas.

v.47

The point is, he is a real person. This was an actual sin, real evil. Jesus’ betrayal is made personal, and Judas emphasizes that. It wasn’t just a symbolic betrayal. It wasn’t just generalized or theoretical. It was,

B. A personal betrayal.

Deeply personal. Judas was not just anyone, he was one of the original twelve.

v.47

And he had conspired with those who have Jesus arrested and put to death, conspiring to identify Jesus with as personal a sign as could be imagined, a kiss.

v.48-49

Then we read,

v.50

Interesting use of the word “friend.” It’s a kindly word, referring to a comrade, a companion, even a partner, reflecting the way in which Judas should have treated Jesus. Jesus had become a man, and he names other men as his friends. He names these twelve disciples as his closest followers. He is one of us, fully man, fully human, even to the point of human weakness and temptation. And he is betrayed by a fellow man, one of his closest companions.

We’ll come back to the theme of prophetic predictions a little later, but I should note here what we read in the prophetic prediction of,

Psalm 41:7 “All who hate me whisper together against me; Against me they devise my hurt. 8 “An evil disease,” they say, “clings to him. And now that he lies down, he will rise up no more.” 9 Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, Who ate my bread, Has lifted up his heel against me.”

We get a few more details in,

John 13:18 “I do not speak concerning all of you. I know whom I have chosen; but that the Scripture may be fulfilled, He who eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me.” 19 Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am He...21 When Jesus had said these things, He was troubled in spirit, and testified and said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me.” 22 Then the disciples looked at one another, perplexed about whom He spoke. 23 Now there was leaning on Jesus’ bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved. 24 Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask who it was of whom He spoke. 25 Then, leaning back on Jesus’ breast, he said to Him, “Lord, who is it?” 26 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. 27 Now after the piece of bread, Satan entered him. Then

Jesus said to him, “What you do, do quickly.”

The closest of friends, and the deepest betrayal possible. And yet, this evil was to be endured!

II. EVIL ENDURED.

Not resisted, but endured. Just as Isaiah has declared, Is. 53:7 “He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth.”

Peter didn’t understand that. With his typical impulsiveness, with his careless lack of understanding and thoughtfulness, he recklessly seeks to defend Jesus from those who came to arrest him.

v.51

The other gospels tell us it was Peter. And obviously, he was trying to take off the man’s head, this servant of the high priest, named Malchus in the other gospels. Malchus ducked, and Peter thus failed to kill him, but his actions clearly demonstrate,

A. The folly of resisting evil with mere natural effort.

Jesus expresses that folly with these words,

v.52

Simply put, you live by the sword you will die by the sword. If you live by your own recourse to your own human strength and ability with your own human, natural effort, then that’s the only protection you will have. If you want to live and survive against all the forces of evil and you attempt to do so with your own natural strength as a human being, you will fail! You will die. So Jesus says, “Put your sword in its place.” Put it away.

There is such a great and timeless lesson in that for all of us, founded on what Paul teaches us in,

Eph. 6:12 “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood...”

The most significant battles of our lives are not battles against natural forces. As Paul continues,

Eph. 6:2 “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”

That’s what Peter missed. That’s what he failed to understand. A sword is of no value in this most basic battle of life, the battle against evil. Paul adds this explanation in,

2 Cor. 10:3 “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. 4 For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, 5 casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, 6 and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.”

“We do not war according to the flesh.” “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood.” So, Peter, put away your sword. You missed the whole point. And so Peter demonstrates,

B. The folly of ignoring the supernatural power of God.

Just look at Jesus’ answer to him.

v.53

Such a pitiful contrast. There was Peter, the man, sword in hand, ready to demonstrate his human, manly bravery with all the

bravado he could muster. Defending Jesus! The incarnate God, the second person of the Trinity. Peter was going to defend Jesus, of whom it is written,

John 1:3. “All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.”

Peter was going to defend the one through whom the whole world was made! With his own sword, with his own strength. And Jesus’ answer is so penetrating, not condescending but so pointed and penetrating.

v.53 Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?”

Such folly, to depend upon ourselves and our own strength, and I put it that way to emphasize just how much we are tempted to be like Peter. His folly can too easily, too often, be our folly. Depending upon our strength for all the battles of life in which we confront that which is evil. Depending upon our own wisdom, the weapons of our own flesh, what what we need are those things Paul identifies as “the whole armor of God.” Those are things by which we endure the evil of this age, and ultimately, to triumph. As Eph. 6 would continue, “that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”

We need the truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, “the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” Then Paul adds,

Eph. 6:18 “...praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit.”

Peter missed all of that. He ignored all of that. He just drew his sort of the fight at hand. And it is his folly that Jesus so deliberately rebukes and corrects. Evil is personified in Judas.

And that evil is to be endured, as we resist it not with mere natural effort but with the supernatural power of God. And that evil, as I mentioned at the outset this afternoon, that evil is foreordained by God himself. It is,

III. EVIL PROPHESED.

Again, Jesus' words,

v.54

v.56

Here is the point, the simple, straightforward point. Here is the explanation of that great fundamental question about evil I posed at the beginning of the sermon, an explanation I give without overthinking the matter, seeking to be faithful to what we read in Scripture. The point is the,

A. The Scriptures prophesy evil acts.

The Scriptures prophesy this particular evil act, that Jesus would suffer at the hands of sinful men, and that he would be put to death. God didn't commit the sinful act nor was he the responsible author of it. God didn't sin, God cannot sin, by the very definition of his existence. He is good. But he is also sovereign, and declares the end from the beginning, as we read in the prophecy of Isaiah. God compares himself to those foolish and false idols so prominent in Isaiah's day,

Is. 46:5 "To whom will you liken Me, and make Me equal And compare Me, that we should be alike? 6 They lavish gold out of the bag, And weigh silver on the scales; They hire a goldsmith, and he makes it a god; They prostrate themselves, yes, they worship. 7 They bear it on the shoulder, they carry it And set it in its place, and it stands; From its place it shall not move. Though one cries out to it, yet it cannot answer Nor save him out of his trouble."

Idols are so utterly useless! Note the contrast with God's power,

Is. 46:8 "Remember this, and show yourselves men; Recall to mind, O you transgressors. 9 Remember the former things of old, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, 10 Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure,' 11 Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man who executes My counsel, from a far country. Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it."

The reference to the bird of prey is the Persian King Cyrus, whom God raised up to free Israel from their captivity. But my point here is the broader context. "I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure."

And so when we see that the Scriptures prophesy the evil acts of evil men, we must then immediately conclude that,

B. Every prophecy of Scripture will come to pass exactly as declared.

And that's the lesson of Judas. So with Judas, we don't simply learn about betrayal. We learn about prophecy. What I might call prophetic certainty. And prophetic certainty means that what God has declared will happen, will happen! What God decrees according to the counsel of his own will, will come to pass exactly as God decreed. That's why Jesus rebuked Peter for what might otherwise be called an act of bravery in his attempt to defend Jesus. He told Peter to put away his sword, for if Jesus would be protected and delivered from this evil betrayal,

v.54 "How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?"

Putting that as a positive statement,

v.56 "But all this was done that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled."

That's what this is all about. Yes, it is about the betrayal of Judas, the horrible, sinful, despicably wicked betrayal of one of Jesus' own disciples. But what is really happening, at far more significant level, is that God is accomplishing his own purpose, bringing to pass the counsel of his own will.

v.56 "But all this was done that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled."

Interesting note at the end of our text, that "all the disciples forsook Him and fled." That, too, is a fulfillment of prophecy as well.

Let me tie all of this together by returning to the great prophecy of Isaiah 53, and with this confident declaration of all that God has determined and prophesied will come to pass according to the counsel of his own will, let me remind you what the great goal and purpose of God was all about. It was for our salvation, for our redemption. God ordained the evil of Judas and all who betrayed Jesus unto death, with this great purpose to fulfill,

Is. 53:4 "Surely [Jesus] has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken,

Smitten by God, and afflicted. 5 But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; We have

turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

So rather than overthinking the whole question of whether God foreordains the evil acts of men, just marvel as you worship the God who so ordered and decreed the sinful acts of men so that your sins and mine would be laid upon Jesus. He was bruised, put to death by evil men, for the forgiveness of our sins. "The LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."