

## **John #37: The Dark Before the Dawn (John 13:18-38)**

### **PRAY**

Disciples of Jesus can sure be disappointments, can't they? Or, better put: Can't *we*?

We are often discouraged by the shortcomings or sins of fellow believers

And *we* are often disappointing to others... Not to mention disappointing to ourselves!

We may think things like, "I wish so-and-so was more loving, more kind, more mature",

Until we notice many of the same weaknesses in ourselves

This world is a dark place, and though the Light of the world has come and shone into our lives,

We still sense a darkness lurking in corners of all of our hearts

So how do we grapple with or address this darkness, in or around us?

Well, we're in good company... Jesus' first disciples often found themselves in this very situation

But also: Jesus found himself in the dark as well... He intentionally walked into it, in fact

And then he asks his followers to follow him, even there—into the dark

Please **TURN** in a Bible with me to John 13, where we'll see this together... John 13 [page #900]

If you're new, we're in the middle of a long series going through this wonderful gospel together

And if you've been away over the summer, let's catch you up quickly:

After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, he withdrew from that area

On his return, Jesus made a triumphant, kingly entrance into Jerusalem

He then declared that his 'hour' had come—it was time to die and be glorified

Before retreating again to a private meal with his disciples, during Passover

In the last passage, we saw him humbly serve his disciples in love, washing *their* feet

He was setting an example in serving others that they were to follow

But while this was going on, there were some ominous undertones that things weren't all right

v.2 mentioned the devil had already moved Judas Iscariot's heart to betray Jesus

And in v.10, Jesus said the disciples were all clean—but not all of them; Judas was not

We'll pick Jesus up mid-thought today... Having just said: **READ v.15** and **READ v.17<sup>1</sup>**

Jesus continues in v.18: **READ v.18a<sup>2</sup>**... That's not, 'I know whom I chose, and Judas ain't it'

No, Judas actually *was* one of his chosen 12 disciples

Rather, Jesus said this to encourage his disciples that he knew what he was doing

He wasn't making a mistake picking a betrayer as a disciple... It was part of a plan

In fact, Scripture had predicted as much, and that prophecy needed to be fulfilled: **READ v.18b<sup>3</sup>**

That was like saying, 'he's turned against me' or 'he's stabbed me in the back'

And that quotation is from Psalm 41,

where David was lamenting both being ill and being mocked by enemies

But even worse than those things was being betrayed by a close friend

And Jesus wanted to warn his disciples that this was coming for him too: **READ v.19<sup>4</sup>**

As always, Jesus wanted his followers to believe in him and receive him as Lord

He was like, 'One of my friends will betray me. But when this happens, don't pity me or think I'm some kind of victim... This should just prove to you that I am who I say I am.'

Notice the 4 little words there, '*that I am he*.' ... It's literally just 'I am.'

Though whether Jesus was again claiming God's holy name for himself,

Or more just saying something like 'I am the Messiah', we don't know

The point was that even the darkest moments of his life and death spoke to who Christ was

**READ v.20<sup>5</sup>** ... “Truly, truly” added gravitas, like: “I tell you the solemn truth”

And he says if we receive the one Jesus sends, we get God the Son and Father as well

‘The one I send’ mostly refers to the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus was sending soon

Father, Son, and Spirit were all working together, and were inseparable

But on a secondary level, Jesus would be sending his disciples out soon as well

He’d say, “*As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.*”<sup>6</sup>

So this would be an encouragement to his frail and faltering disciples:

They were a team... And if people rejected them, they were rejecting Jesus

[tr] Once we see who Jesus is and believe in him, we too are sent out—meant to follow him

‘But,’ we say, ‘he’s gone to some pretty dark, scary, and painful places!’... Indeed he has

And yet we’re still called to follow him—with his authorization and authority, yes

But also into similarly dark times or places... The first big truth we see here is this:

### **Following Jesus into the dark entails facing the trouble of betrayal (v.18-30)**

[r] Following Jesus into the dark can sometimes mean facing the very real trouble of betrayal

I say ‘trouble’ as that’s exactly what Jesus felt: troubled... **READ v.21<sup>7</sup>**... He was visibly shook

Can you hear anguish in his voice as he said this? Can you see his eyes well up with tears?

Lest we think Judas was purely a villain, Jesus was completely broken up over his betrayal

Judas was his friend! They’d shared many meals and countless hours together

Being hated by an enemy is bad... Being betrayed by a friend is far worse

One of the “darkest experiences that a human being can endure”<sup>8</sup>

Imagine taking a road trip with someone you considered one of your absolute BFFs,

When you get pulled over for speeding, and a police officer approaches your vehicle

But then your friend just starts blurting out all kinds of other crimes that they say you did

(Whether you did them or not)... And one of these crimes is death-penalty-serious

How betrayed would you feel? You’d be shell-shocked: ‘That came out of the blue

I thought you were my friend... I thought you were on my side or had my back.’

This is a bit of how Jesus must’ve felt, and then some... He was betrayed *unto death*

Jesus was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief<sup>9</sup>

Betrayal was an especially agonizing sorrow, which he bore to love us... Wow

Notice though that it’s not a sin (not wrong) to be troubled in this troubling world... Jesus was

Some of you have experienced deep and gut-wrenching betrayals in life: An unfaithful spouse...

A friendship abandoned... A slanderous post... A family scorning your faith

Some of these betrayals stem simply from the brokenness of this world

And some of them stem more specifically from you following Jesus into the dark

We all have to be ready to face betrayals, if we’re walking in his footsteps

That doesn’t mean they won’t sting... But at least they shouldn’t be as surprising...

And at least we have a Saviour who sympathizes with us in our suffering... He’s been there

**READ v.21b<sup>10</sup>** ... How would you react if you were there, around that table?

I think I’d be bug-eyed and bewildered: ‘What!?’

Jesus never made stuff up... But how could this happen?! Who would do such a thing?!

I think I'd look around at everyone with suspicion, and then look at myself with fear  
Another account says they began to be sorrowful and ask, one by one, '*Is it I?*'<sup>11</sup>  
**READ v.22-24**<sup>12</sup>... Maybe Peter was embarrassed about what he said earlier, so he was shy now  
Whatever the reason, he gestured to John to try to get Jesus to elaborate  
We wonder, though: How did no one suspect Judas? Apparently, he had everyone fooled  
A reminder to us that only God knows people's hearts and where they stand with him

You might wonder why I said Peter wanted *John* to ask Jesus, as John isn't named here  
He is just called the disciple 'whom Jesus loved'  
Well, through a process of deduction and comparing other passages (that I don't have time to go into today), scholars have decided this was John's nickname for himself  
He wasn't bragging that he was *more* loved by Jesus than other disciples were  
He was just so personally aware of how loved he was that he defined himself by it  
The more aware we are of our own sin and shortcomings, the more incredible God's love will be,  
And the more we'll want him to get all the glory, while we fade into the background  
So John here, sitting in a place of honour, and also in a place of intimate friendship, speaks up:  
**READ v.25**<sup>13</sup>... Stop! Don't read any kind of western, post-modern erotic notions into this  
There was nothing weird about men being in close proximity with each other at that time  
But John, probably facing away from Jesus, leaned back and asked—perhaps merely whispered:  
'Who are you talking about, Lord?' ...**READ v.26-27**<sup>14</sup> (Or, 'Get it over with...')

At this moment, I'd have expected the table to erupt with anger: 'Judas! How could you!?'  
But no: Either Jesus only answered John quietly, so that others didn't hear what he said  
Or... maybe things were so incongruent, that nothing was making sense  
After all, the host of a feast (which Jesus was acting as) would sometimes hand a particularly tasty morsel of food to a guest as a mark of honour or friendship<sup>15</sup>  
So by his words, Jesus was naming a betrayer... But by his actions, a friend  
So they were confused: **READ v.28-29**<sup>16</sup>.... Two completely normal requests during the Passover  
But Judas wasn't just sent out on a holiday errand... **READ 30**<sup>17</sup>  
No one here today should directly identify with Judas—he's a very unique case in all of history  
Even if you currently reject Jesus, you're neither possessed by Satan nor a lost cause  
And if you are a follower of Jesus, you cannot betray him to the depths Judas did  
However, I think we can anticipate potentially *being betrayed* like Jesus was  
By extension, the disciples must've felt betrayed by their friend as well  
We all must count the cost: Following Jesus into the dark entails facing the trouble of betrayal

[tr] And *dark* it was! Did you notice that seemingly innocuous comment, "*And it was night.*"?  
In John, whenever darkness is mentioned, it seems to refer to more than physical darkness  
Thus, "night" becomes an ominous symbol (an omen) that things are not good  
Passover always happened at a full moon... But Judas was swallowed up by darkness  
And the dark was coming for Jesus... Like a night, his end was drawing near  
However, it's not all bad news... It was night now, but a dawn was eventually coming... See:

**Following Jesus into the dark entails waiting for the dawn of glory (v.31-33)**

[r] Following Jesus into the dark means waiting, as he did, for the dawn of glory

In v.31, Jesus gets remarkably positive, considering everything going on:

**READ v.31-32<sup>18</sup>**... This echoes what Jesus said recently in John:

That the cross wasn't only horrors and agonies for Jesus...

It also meant glory for Jesus—and glory for God the Father

It's where all the nature and attributes of God went on display like never before:

The resplendence of his holiness, love, justice, mercy, righteousness, and grace

Besides, it wasn't only the time for death, but also for resurrection and ascension

Jesus would be glorified, his Father would be glorified—both by each other... Glory all around!

If you feel like you're really experiencing darkness today... Remember: a dawn is coming

Jesus' time for glorification had come... But not the disciples'... And not ours

So he tenderly talks to them like they were his kids: **READ v.33<sup>19</sup>**

Can you imagine how they felt, kids? Confused... sad... afraid

It's like Jesus wrapped his arms around them:

'My beloved children... I have to go away soon... And you can't come with me.'

Not overly comforting! Except for the fact that a few lines later, Jesus says they *will follow later*

Where was he going, anyway? John told us that back in v.1 of this chapter:

The time had come for Jesus "*to depart out of this world to the Father*"

He was headed for glory... It was night, but the sun would rise again

One day, the disciples, too, would pass through death, resurrection, and then be glorified

And in our darkest days, we have to fix our eyes on that day

Can you hear his voice in your heart today? Saying 'My child, it may be dark now...

But dawn is coming... Hold on... Wait patiently... Persevere... Glory awaits!'

*"For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen."* (2 Corinthians 4:17-18)

[tr] It's at this moment that Jesus gives his disciples a very famous command: **READ v.34<sup>20</sup>**

He's just told them he will depart where they can't go... But he wasn't leaving them alone

Not only would they have the Holy Spirit, which we'll get to in chapter 14,

But they would have each other... And they would need to lean on one another, in love

It's almost like Jesus says: "Be there for each other once I'm gone"

If they were frightened by what was coming, Christian love was meant to be a comfort... And so:

**Following Jesus into the dark entails loving one another as he loved (v.34-35)**

[r] Following Jesus into the dark entails loving one another as he loved us

**READ v.34<sup>21</sup>**... How was this new? Scripture had clearly commanded love before this

It was new because of the new example it was to follow: *Love... just as I have loved you*

These were marching orders for the new family Jesus was forming through the gospel

"*As I have loved you*" points us, again, to Jesus' human life, suffering, and death on the cross

Jesus voluntarily ventured into the deepest darkness of the cross,

Enduring physical agony along with the weight of both human sin and divine wrath

In order to demonstrate and distribute God's self-sacrificial love to us

If you haven't personally realized his love for you, or accepted his sacrifice in your place,

I pray that you will do so today... He went through the dark, so we can live in his light

Do you feel stuck in the darkness today? Like you could really use some light in your life?

Then come to Jesus... He is full of light, life, and love... Let him love you

And then once we have been loved, we are to turn around and love others with the same love:

**READ v.34b<sup>22</sup>**... D.A. Carson points out that *"The new command is simple enough for a toddler to memorize and appreciate, profound enough that the most mature believers are repeatedly embarrassed at how poorly they comprehend it and put it into practice."*

Loving just as Christ loved means we are to give of ourselves sacrificially—

time, wealth, or effort—for the sake of others... To promote their joy and peace

We give, we serve, we pray, we welcome, we help, we witness, we sympathize, we share,  
we encourage, we discipline, we comfort, we celebrate, we mourn, we forgive

By the way, I believe our small groups have a special opportunity to show this kind of love

They're the front lines of where much of this happens in our church

But in whatever ways possible, we sacrifice ourselves, to the point of *death of self*... that's love

As John says elsewhere: *"By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers... Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth."* (1 John 3:16, 18)

Does this all mean we're only supposed to love fellow believers, not necessarily unbelievers?

No, we must love our neighbours, no matter who they are—that's Christlike love, too

But we are called to love one another in the family of God to an even greater degree

Besides, Jesus still has people in view who aren't yet part of the family: **READ v.35<sup>23</sup>**

So, on one level, our love helps support one another in the dark of this world

And on another level, our love is meant to show our identity to a watching world

So that 'all people'—everyone—in darkness might see the light

Note a critical distinction here: Our love doesn't *make* us disciples, it *shows* us to be disciples

Now, question: Is this how Jesus' disciples are generally known today? Sadly, no

This is partly due to our failures to put this new command into practice

And partly due to negative stereotypes of Christians that are perpetuated

We have been known—sometimes fairly, sometimes not—for our disunity, division, infighting,  
judgmentalism, legalism, moralism, naivete, and political affinities, more than for our love

Now, love is not squishy sentimentalism or blind affirmation like our world imagines

Love tells the truth and seeks people's best, even if they despise it

But at the same time, we need to repent of wherever we've fallen short—let's own our part,  
and recommit to pursuing a more Christlike love

Doing better, though, must be fuelled by the gospel and by God's love for us in Christ

Our love—or lack thereof—shows what kind of God we really believe in

Do we believe in a God who loves us so much that he gave his Son to die for us?

Or do we believe in a God who just wants us to be better people? The difference is vast

To paraphrase one pastor: We don't need better manners... We need truer faith

*That's* when the world might start to feel that Jesus has come to town<sup>24</sup>

Do you know how the planet Neptune was discovered back in the 1800s?

No one saw it in the night sky or spotted it in a telescope... It was found by math

Astronomers began to notice strange irregularities in the orbit of the planet Uranus

It kept deviating from its expected path around the sun



They deduced that something else big must be out there, tugging at it with gravity  
They then worked out that another planet must exist and exactly where it would be,  
Even without being able to see it

Like this, Sam Allberry and Ray Ortlund explain that: *“A church, your church, is to be so marked by the love of Christ that his existence will be believed even when he himself isn’t seen... As the world looks on, they will see what appears to be all sorts of irregularities, deviations from the normal paths of behaviour [people have come to expect] such as sins freely confessed, grace extended and received, people honoured and encouraged, and the welcome of Christ made manifest through mutual care and embrace. As a result, the presence and smile of Jesus himself will become a felt human reality. Such wonders [will display] an orbit of life that is unmistakably different. Instances of deep love that reveal the gravitational pull of a greater and unseen presence. Undeniable signs that this community of believers is held together by nothing less than a divine love. The spectator who begins to ponder these earthbound irregularities will, by grace, be directed to the perfect heavenly source of them all.”*

As a vivid example of this, author and CEO Brent Beshore recently shared his testimony online:

*“In my late 20s, I was an ardent atheist. I met some smart, well-read, successful people whose lives looked fundamentally different than mine. And to my surprise and chagrin, they were devout Christians. I couldn’t believe it. They broke all my assumptions. They were funny and loving, kind and humble. They had courage and largely lived without the fear, anxiety, and malaise I felt and saw clearly in my friends. They lived with a freedom that I had never experienced. They were present and caring and comfortable in their own skin. They helped the helpless with no desire for recognition or expectation of reciprocity. Their worldview was so different than mine and so shocking by comparison that it forced me to reconsider my daily operating beliefs. I was focused on me; they were focused on others. I was obsessed with accumulating money, power and fame; they were uncomfortably generous and carefree with their resources... The question I had to face was this—is it true because it works? Or, does it work because it’s true? That’s what started my exploration, which ended in concluding that Jesus was who he says he was. And it transformed my life.”*

I don’t share any of this to toot our own horn and say “Yay us!”

I mean to show us how things can be and to inspire us again to follow Christ’s example

One more example of this... Apologist Glen Scrivener encourages us, in personal evangelism, to openly talk about what you love about your church and Christian community

To constantly finish the sentence, “I love my church because...”

Maybe ‘we call ourselves brother or sister, but it’s more than just words’

Or ‘the way they cared for me when I was in a really tough season was amazing’

He tells the story how one day his car broke down and had to be towed to his mechanic’s shop

As he got home late that night, he found an envelope left on the doormat

It had his church’s logo on it, but no names or anything... 400 pounds of cash was inside

He was stunned, because he hadn’t told anyone but his wife about his car breaking down

And, all of a sudden, he got this big, anonymous gift from someone in his church

The next morning, he called the mechanic to ask him what the damage was

And you guessed it: He said, ‘Well you won’t like it... It’ll cost about 400 pounds’

Glen said, ‘Let me tell you a funny story!’, and he told him about this gift he’d received

However, Glen said that what he thought was going to impress him was that  $400 = 400$   
 But the mechanic didn't care that the math matched up...  
 He zeroed in on the blindingly obvious point which was invisible to Glen:  
*"Are you telling me that there are members of your church who would just anonymously give you 400 pounds for no reason whatsoever?"*  
 "Oh yeah, that is pretty cool isn't it?"  
 "What time do you meet on Sunday?"  
 Glen concluded: *"The miracle that I thought was the miracle was that 400 matches 400. The miracle that absolutely struck him between the eyes was 'Look how they love one another!'"* ...**READ v.35<sup>25</sup>**... Lord, let this be true of us! [ ]

[tr] This would be a wonderful place to end the sermon today... However, Peter doesn't let us  
 He was still stuck on something Jesus had said a moment earlier... He couldn't shake it:

**READ v.36<sup>26</sup>**... 'Well, that doesn't make sense...' **READ v.37<sup>27</sup>**

Without looking ahead, what's the problem with Peter's question and commitment here?

- 1) Jesus *had* to go where no one else could yet go
- 2) The darkness wasn't just *out there* for Peter; it was *in here*

And so, we have to reckon with this final point before we leave this passage:

### **Following Jesus into the dark entails facing up to our own darkness (v.36-38)**

[r] Following Jesus into the dark entails facing up to our own inner darkness

Despite seemingly noble devotion, Peter was blind to his own darkness

He was like, "I'm ready to die for you!"... But soberly, **READ v.38<sup>28</sup>**

As D.A. Carson comments: *"Sadly, good intentions in a secure room after good food are far less attractive in a darkened garden with a hostile mob. At this point in his pilgrimage, Peter's intentions and self-assessment vastly outstrip his strength."*

There are two major failures of the disciples in this passage: Judas' betrayal, and Peter's denials

On the surface, they may seem to be the same, but they are very different

We aren't supposed to relate to Judas, but I believe we can and should relate to Peter

Because Peter was a true believer, and there was mercy for him in the end

Just as there is for us, despite our myriad of dark disappointments

Peter may have denied Jesus, but Jesus never disowned Peter

The warning for us is to not be ignorant about our innate darkness and our weaknesses

If Jesus' closest companions who walked with him 24/7 for years can fall, so can we

We are not destined or certain to fail, but we are still frail in many ways

I don't think we comprehend how, given the right temptation at the right time,  
 we are all susceptible to far more evil than we think we are capable of

We've got to face up to the darkness within

We may be saved and totally secure in Christ's love, yet still sin grievously

*"Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall."* (1 Corinthians 10:12)

Some of you may not need warned, because you've already fallen short

If you sense betrayal or denial in your heart, you can return to Christ today

The failures of Peter and the other disciples should drive us, in total dependence, to Jesus

He is the Light of the world... He can shine into our darkness, cleansing and restoring us

## CONCLUSION

His followers—others and ourselves—will inevitably disappoint us at times  
Yet at other times, they will blow us away with their love

Because, as Ephesians 5:8 puts it: *“...at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.”* And we’re learning to *“Walk as children of light.”*

So even as we follow Jesus into the dark,  
remember that we will also follow him into the light of the dawn

## PRAY

### Benediction: prayer, 5min,

<sup>1</sup> I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you... If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

<sup>2</sup> I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen.

<sup>3</sup> But the Scripture will be fulfilled, ‘He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.’

<sup>4</sup> I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he.

<sup>5</sup> Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me.”

<sup>6</sup> John 20:21

<sup>7</sup> After saying these things, Jesus was troubled in his spirit, and testified, “Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.”

<sup>8</sup> HT Sproul

<sup>9</sup> Isaiah 53:3

<sup>10</sup> “Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.”

<sup>11</sup> Mark 14:19

<sup>12</sup> The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he spoke. One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was reclining at table at Jesus' side, so Simon Peter motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking.

<sup>13</sup> So that disciple, leaning back against Jesus, said to him, “Lord, who is it?”

<sup>14</sup> 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. Then after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, “What you are going to do, do quickly.”

<sup>15</sup> Carson

<sup>16</sup> Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. 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.

<sup>17</sup> So, after receiving the morsel of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.

<sup>18</sup> When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once.

<sup>19</sup> Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, ‘Where I am going you cannot come.’

<sup>20</sup> A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

<sup>21</sup> A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

<sup>22</sup> love one another: just as I have loved you,

<sup>23</sup> By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

<sup>24</sup> HT Ray Ortlund

<sup>25</sup> By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

<sup>26</sup> Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, where are you going?” Jesus answered him, “Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward.”

<sup>27</sup> Peter said to him, “Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.”

<sup>28</sup> Jesus answered, “Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times.