



SERMON TITLE: A Case Study in Betrayal

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SCRIPTURE: John 13:18-30

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"These things are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ" (John 20:31). This is how John concludes his biography of Jesus. He wanted the young, the old, the sick, the well, the despairing, the hopeful, the skeptics, the faithful, and whoever reads his account of Jesus to believe and trust him more fully. But what did John want them to believe? He wanted them to believe that Jesus alone brought eternal life into the present, broken world. And for all who enter this eternal life with God right now, we—like John—are exiles. For all who enter a relationship with Jesus, we will very likely be marginalized and dismissed because we follow him. So, what does it mean to believe? And how do we mature in believing? What does it mean to remain faithful to God when the pressure is on? These are the things that John will help us explore by showing us the glory and beauty of Jesus.

In our last two messages, we've seen Jesus take on the form of a lowly servant as he has washed his disciple's feet. He's showing them what true "greatness in the Kingdom of Heaven" looks like—a "*first-shall-be-last-and-the-last-first*" kind of greatness—the greatness of *humble service*—of not thinking of yourself as *too good or too busy or too important* to apply your heart and your hands to the places of greatest need, no matter how difficult or demeaning that service might be. We are now in John 13:18-30. I've entitled this message—"A Case Study in Betrayal" b/c what we're about to read is how Jesus deals with Judas Iscariot, who on this night, will betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver—which, interestingly enough, was the price of a common slave.

READ 13:18-30 — The worst thing about Judas was that he spent three years with Jesus, pretty much 24/7, but he never embraced Jesus as the others did. Jesus loved him, but Judas never returned that love. And when his heart became hardened enough, Judas arranged to have Jesus killed. At the beginning of chp13, there in v2, we're told that the *devil had already put it into Judas' heart to betray him*. So, we know that he's already made a bargain to betray Jesus for money, but there's still time to repent and change his mind. Jesus knows this, "*He knew the one who was betraying him*" (v11). Jesus knew the wheels of betrayal were in motion. So, around that Passover table, Jesus tells his disciples what will happen before it happens so that when it happens, they will know that he is who he always claimed to be (v19). These men have a very fragile faith. Soon, Peter will deny Jesus, and the rest will desert Jesus. To discover that there had been a traitor in their midst all along, well, that could call the message and the mission into question. Jesus tells them two things to head off a failure of faith. First, he says, "I know who I have chosen." In other words, what Judas is about to do, did not catch me by surprise. I knew his heart all along (see John 6:64, 7-0-71). Second, Jesus tells them that Judas' defection did not shock God. His betrayal was foretold in OT Scripture, namely, Ps41:9 (see also Jn17:12; Ps55:20; Zech11:12-13). Judas's betrayal was not a surprise to Jesus. It was a fulfillment of OT prophecy. He did not act as he did b/c God forced him to betray Jesus. He made his own choice, but at the same time, the Messiah's betrayal had been foretold long ago. It's absolutely essential that the disciples know these things, so they don't have to rethink everything they've ever believed about Jesus. That's why Jesus says in v19—"I'm telling you this before it happens so that when it does happen, you will believe that I am who I've claimed to be." Then in v20, Jesus says, ²⁰Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me." *What is that about?* Jesus is saying, "I'm also telling you this ahead of time, *so you will know that your commission still stands* (v20). You find statements like this—*Whoever receives you, receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me*—you find statements like this in Matt10, Mk9, Lk9 and Lk10—this is commissioning language. *So why is he saying this now?* Because he wants the disciples to know that even with the shocking news that one of them had been a traitor all along—even with this devastating breach of trust—the integrity of their commission is not compromised. Their mission still stands. He's saying, "The defection of Judas, the betrayal of Judas, does not mean the message of the Gospel is suspect or the mission I've given you has been invalidated." Then Jesus, troubled in his spirit, says it straight out—"I'm telling you the truth, one of you will betray me" (v21). And when he says this, the clock starts ticking. He knows in a few short minutes Judas will leave to execute his plan. He knows that tomorrow he will be crucified. The disciples

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have no idea who Jesus could be talking about. The most interesting thing is that no one said, "It's Judas, isn't it? It has to be Judas!" Judas had blended in so well that no one suspected him. In fact, that night, John sits on Jesus' left side, and Judas is sitting on his right. Judas is in the seat of honor, in the seat of an intimate friend. John leans over to ask Jesus who the betrayer is. This is a private moment between John and Jesus. Jesus tells John that the betrayer is the one to whom he gives the first bite of bread and paste. Jesus gives the first bite to Judas. In that day, the custom was that the one in the seat of honor next to the host received the first bite. Jesus reaches out to Judas with amazing grace all the way to the end, knowing that he has set the wheels of betrayal in motion. Then hell arrived—v27—Satan takes full possession of Judas. Jesus tells Judas to leave and carry out his plan quickly. At this point, Jesus is releasing Judas. Judas has made up his mind, he's determined to go through with his shameful plan, and Jesus lets him go. Again, no one in the room knows why Jesus has dismissed Judas. Judas leaves and walks into the night.

Judas is one of the most tragic stories in human history. He was personally chosen by Jesus to be with him day and night for three years. Judas saw it all, heard it all, and experienced it all. He experienced Jesus' love and laughter. He saw the great miracles Jesus performed and heard his amazing teaching. He watched as Jesus was relentlessly attacked by the religious leaders. He, along with the others, was sent out to preach the Gospel, heal the sick, and cast out demons. But he had a hard, treacherous heart all along (see Jn6:64, 70-71). We read other evidence that his heart was not right in Jn12:4-6, where we're also told that he was stealing money from the ministry fund. He was stealing from Jesus while at the same time having these incredible opportunities at Jesus' side. No one knows for sure why Judas betrayed Jesus, but we are sure that his heart was set on something than he thought was more important than being a true disciple of Jesus. So was Judas saved or lost? Is he in heaven or hell? You've got to listen to the message to find out J. Look at Jn17:12 again, also Matt 26:24; and Acts 1:25 and you decide. If you are wondering how he could have worked miracles and cast out demons and not been a true believer, read what Jesus says about that in Matt7:21-22. If you are wondering about Judas repenting (cf Matt27:3), the word for "repentance" in the old KJV is not the usual Greek word for "repentance." It's a word that means "remorse." He regretted what he had done. Repentance means that you regret what you've done, and you take steps to make things right. Judas made no such attempt to make amends.

Now, what about us? Remember, John wrote this story into his Gospel b/c he wants us to see that Jesus really is the Savior he claimed to be and that by believing in him, we would receive and experience abundant, eternal life (cf 20:31). So, the question is: What are we supposed to 'take-away' from this story that strengthens our faith and deepens our experience with Christ? Two things...

First, this case study in betrayal is also a case study in grace. Jesus knew from the beginning who it was that would betray him (cf Jn6:64;70-71). Jesus knew all along what was in his heart. He knew that he was stealing money from the ministry moneybag. But Jesus treated Judas with the same love and care as all the others. He loved Judas all the way to the end (13:1). He washed his feet. He seated him in the seat of honor next to him. He gave him the first bite of the meal. All these are acts of grace in the face of betrayal. Jesus never responded to Judas in kind. That is, he never treated Judas the way Judas treated him. In the end, he released Judas to go and do what he had determined to do. And that truly is amazing grace, isn't it?

Second, this case study in betrayal is also a case study in the Sovereignty of God. Jesus says that he's telling his disciples that he will be betrayed before it happens, so their faith will not be shaken when it happens (v19). 13:19 ties directly to 20:31, doesn't it? John says, "I *write* these things that you will believe." Jesus says, "I'm *telling* you these things that you will believe." In telling us beforehand, we have confidence that Jesus is directing the course of human history. It's all unfolding according to the sovereign plan of God. And that truly is a faith builder, isn't it?

Discussion Starters

- Have you ever been betrayed by someone close to you? If so, how did that make you feel?
- Why is betrayal so hurtful?
- How do most of us typically respond to someone who has betrayed us?

Read John 13:18-30

- This passage starts in the middle of a bigger conversation. Ask somebody to tell the story up to this point to set the context for these verses.

- What has John told us about Judas back at the beginning of the chapter? (v2) What has John told us about what Jesus knew about Judas (v11)?
- What details of this story had you never heard or thought much about before?
- Why was it so important for Jesus to tell them ahead of time about his upcoming betrayal? What two points did he make to help strengthen his disciples' faith?
- How does v20 fit into this conversation?
- When Christians fall into public sin, many non-Christians feel like that invalidates Christianity. What does Jesus tell his disciples here counteract that false belief?
- When Jesus says, "I'm telling you the truth, one of you will betray me," no one had any idea who the betrayer could be. How is it possible for a person to hide who they really are for such a long time without anybody knowing who they really are?
- Have you ever had to release someone you care for to do what they have determined to do?
- How is this "case study of betrayal" also a "case study of grace?"
- How does knowing what Jesus says about the future strengthen your faith?