

Sermons on Matthew

The Betrayal

Matthew 26:14-25

With Study Questions

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Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests ⁻¹⁵⁻ and said, “What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?” And they counted out to him thirty pieces of silver. ⁻¹⁶⁻ So from that time he sought opportunity to betray Him.

⁻¹⁷⁻ Now on the first *day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread* the disciples came to Jesus, saying to Him, “Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?”

⁻¹⁸⁻ And He said, “Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, ‘The Teacher says, “My time is at hand; I will keep the Passover at your house with My disciples.”’

⁻¹⁹⁻ So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them; and they prepared the Passover.

⁻²⁰⁻ When evening had come, He sat down with the twelve. ⁻²¹⁻ Now as they were eating, He said, “Assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me.”

⁻²²⁻ And they were exceedingly sorrowful, and each of them began to say to Him, “Lord, is it I?”

⁻²³⁻ He answered and said, “He who dipped *his* hand with Me in the dish will betray Me. ⁻²⁴⁻ 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.”

⁻²⁵⁻ Then Judas, who was betraying Him, answered and said, “Rabbi, is it I?” He said to him, “You have said it.” (Matthew 26:14-25)

Introduction

A Dark Event

One is hard-pressed to find a more infamous character in all of history than Judas Iscariot. His betrayal of Jesus is rightly viewed as one of the most monstrous actions in all of human history.

There have been other traitors but none compare to Judas. The reason his treachery surpasses that of all others is spelled out in his own words, **“I have sinned by betraying innocent blood”** (Matthew 27:4). All

other traitors could possibly find some justification for their duplicitous actions, but not Judas.

Judas had walked with Jesus for years. He had heard the words of truth and seen the miraculous and evidentiary signs which confirmed Christ's testimony to His own deity. It takes all of one day with a companion to see some level of his sin, even our most virtuous friends! But Judas had seen Jesus in the most difficult of situations and never once did Jesus give any sign of doing that which was displeasing to His Father in heaven. The actions of Judas were uniquely dark!

And if there are any doubts about the sinister nature of Judas and his actions (because there are those who seek to exonerate Judas) consider that he is described by Jesus as **"a devil"** (John 6:70).

An Ordained Event

Yet we also read of the events perpetrated by Judas being decreed by God prior to his birth. An examination of this passage makes it readily apparent that the actions of Judas did not take Jesus by surprise, quite the contrary—while Judas was organizing his treachery—Jesus was predicting it. And His predictions were very specific.

It wasn't like a seminary professor I once had explained when he was asked, **"Was it necessary that Judas would betray Jesus?"** His answer was, **"No, but if Judas didn't betray Him, someone else would have?"** It's hard to figure out what a foggy answer like that means. Logic dictates that if you don't know some individual is going to do something that you can't know if anyone will do something.

When I took my emergency health safety training seminars they told us never to yell into a crowd, **"Someone call an ambulance!"** You had to be specific, look at a certain person and say, **"You, call an ambulance!"** If you don't know someone is doing something, you can't know for sure that anyone is.

So it was not only unavoidable (at least in a certain sense) that Jesus would be betrayed, but that Judas would be the one who betrayed Him—even the exact amount of silver was ordained by God (Zechariah 11:12, 13).

Good and Evil

This event, more than most, brings into question the nature of good and evil and right and wrong. Some people deny that these things even

exist. If you believe they do exist, they think you're wrong. This, of course, betrays the folly of their thinking. If you don't believe in right and wrong, how can you think I'm wrong?

Others believe in right and wrong and good and evil, but they view the will of man as the genesis or first cause of these things. But it is certainly not the case in the recorded event of Judas' betrayal. The actions of Judas were ordained before Judas was yet born.

I would argue that, even though we're not always invited to look within the veil of the genuine source, or ultimate cause (first cause) of events, as we are here, this was not unique to Judas' betrayal. All betrayal, all treachery, all sin, though authored by men and demons, is within the vector of God's sovereign decrees—and we, as believers in that God, are to take comfort in that knowledge. It is not for merely academic reasons that Solomon writes:

The Lord has made all for Himself, yes, even the wicked for the day of doom (Proverbs 16:4).

Jesus was on the threshold of an encounter with hell. His followers would scatter like sheep (Matthew 26:31). But when, by the grace of God, their fear would subside, they would no doubt reconsider the words of Jesus. And they would be strengthened in their convictions with the knowledge that it is not the devil nor blind fortune governing events.

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 (Isaiah 46:9-11).

God has His own just, righteous and glorious purposes for ordaining events—even events which appear evil and disastrous from a certain perspective. But one day, when our eyes are truly opened in glory, we will praise God for every moment of history—even our darkest ones.

Then one of the twelve, called __Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests ⁻¹⁵⁻ and said, __“ _What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?_” And they counted out to him thirty pieces of silver. ⁻¹⁶⁻ So from that time he sought opportunity to betray Him (Matthew 26:14-16). -

Unmoved Judas—Evil Priests

Judas was unaffected by what Matthew had just recorded—the woman who had poured expensive, fragrant oil upon Jesus. He was unmoved by Jesus’ reference to His imminent burial. His mind was on money. The perfume, in his mind, was a waste of money (John 12:4, 5), he betrayed Jesus for money, and he stole money (John 12:6).

There may have been grander reasons for Judas’ betrayal (some speculate it was politically motivated to force Jesus’ to overthrow Rome). But what we read of is money and his love of it. Perhaps this is what Paul had in mind when he wrote:

For the love of money is a root of all *kinds of evil*, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows (1 Timothy 6:10).

And let us not forget the priests, who were willing to accommodate Judas’ greed. And this they did with such diabolical contempt for God, that it never occurred to them what a stench they had become. Later when Judas’ worldly grief would get the better of him and he would return the silver, instead of responding to a righteous conviction continued to strain at gnats.

But the chief priests took the silver pieces and said, “_It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, because they are the price of blood._” ⁻⁷⁻ And they consulted together and bought with them the potter’s field, to bury strangers in (Matthew 27:6, 7).

Astonishing, what they viewed as not “lawful” in light of their treachery. Willful blindness is a murky sin.

If you say, “_Surely we did not know this,_” Does not __He who weighs the hearts consider *it*? He who keeps your soul, does He *not* know *it*? And will He *not* render to *each* man __according to his deeds? (Proverbs 24:12)

__Now on the first *day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread* the disciples came to Jesus, saying to Him, “_Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?” ⁻¹⁸⁻ And He said, “_Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, ‘_The Teacher says, “_My time is at hand; I will keep the Passover at your house with My disciples.”_” ⁻¹⁹⁻ So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them; and they prepared the Passover. ⁻²⁰⁻ __When evening had come, He sat down with the twelve (Matthew 26:17-19).

Controlling the Passover

Jesus always did that which was pleasing in the eyes of His Father. He would keep the feasts. He would prepare to eat the Passover—even though this Passover would be unlike any other—for He would soon announce that this is the New Covenant, in His blood (Matthew 26:28). Paul made it very clear that Christ is our Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7).

One might ask why all the intrigue regarding this Passover meal. Why were they to find this man and say these words and observe this mysterious response? It can’t be said for sure, but it appears as if Jesus was making clear who was truly orchestrating all the events. If the “**winds and the sea obey Him**” (Matthew 8:27) how much more those lesser events which confront our lives moment by moment?

They would not sit down together in the intimacy of a meal. The treachery of Judas would not be done long distance. There would be eating and talking. They would have prayed together. After years of ministry, Jesus would make the shocking announcement.

Now as they were eating, He said, “_Assuredly, I say to you, one of you will __betray Me.” ⁻²²⁻ And they were exceedingly sorrowful, and each of them began to say to Him, “_Lord, is it I?” ⁻²³⁻ He answered and said, __“_He who dipped *his* hand with Me in the dish will betray Me. ⁻²⁴⁻ 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.” ⁻²⁵⁻ Then Judas, who was betraying Him, answered and

said, “_Rabbi, is it I?_” He said to him, “_You have said it_” (Matthew 26:21-25).

Exceeding Sorrow

Jesus now brings to the light of day that which was done secretly. The betrayal would most assuredly take place. The apostles were exceedingly sorrowful. Such a breach of trust within the boundaries of ministry! Is there a greater violation than seeking dishonest gain (1 Peter 5:2) in the guise of ministry? To disrupt the wonderful mission of proclaiming the Good News by turning on those who you ate, slept, prayed and served with?

And let the sorrow of Jesus not be lost on us. He is after all “fully man.” If the sorrow of the apostles was exceeding because of their love of God and love for one another—how much more the sorrow of Christ! The prophetic Psalm was fulfilled:

_Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, _Who ate my bread, Has _lifted up *his* heel against me (Psalm 41:9).

The apostles each asked “Is it I” revealing that Judas wasn’t the obvious culprit.

It is Written, But Woe...

In verse 24 we see one of the only rational explanations for the existence of God and good and evil and human culpability. Jesus explains **“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._”**

It was written (in the Scriptures of the Old Testament) that Judas would betray Him. The event was a pre-determined event (Luke 22:22). Satan entered Judas to this end (Luke 22:3). Yet Judas was fully culpable for his evil deed.

Whatever understanding we have of the sovereignty of God (and I hope we understand it to mean that God ordains, and is the first cause, of all events) it should not lower human responsibility one rung on the ladder of justice.

An Appropriate Mechanism

Matthew conveys that when Judas gave his “is it I?” he was “betraying.” The word ‘betraying’ is in the present, active. The process of betrayal was already at work.

How appropriate that the mechanism by which God would save the world was the intimate and demented wickedness of a member of the very race which were to be the objects of His deliverance. Talk about biting the hand that feeds you! He saves the kennel by feeding the vicious dogs His own body.

Anyone observing Jesus and His apostles for these three years may have viewed them as a group, as a collective of religious workers. But as we approach the cross, the singularity of Jesus and His work of redemption would become clear. He would be betrayed, denied and abandoned. There would be no confusion that the salvation of mankind was purchased, not by a cooperative effort of religious leaders, but by one Man who would soon face, and defeat our greatest enemy.

Questions for Study

1. Why was Judas’ betrayal especially hideous (pages 2, 3).
2. Was it necessary (ordained) that Judas would betray Jesus (page 3)?
3. What question does this force us to answer (pages 3, 4)?
4. How do you understand God’s sovereignty as it relates to human culpability (responsibility for our actions) (pages 3, 4)?

5. What event does Matthew record just prior to mentioning Judas' betrayal? Why do you think he mentions it (page 5)?
6. What was the motive behind Judas' actions (page 5)?
7. How do the priests fit in this (pages 5, 6)?
8. What announcement did Jesus make at the Passover meal (pages 6, 7)?
9. Why would Jesus continue to demonstrate His control over all these events?
10. Why is the sin of man an appropriate mechanism for achieving the events by which Jesus would save souls (pages 8, 9)?