

Judas and Jesus: Betrayal meets Love – John 13:18-30 + Romans 8:1-8

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Introduction

Well, good morning everyone, good to be with you as we continue our journey through John's Gospel in this Advent Season.

Okay, so there's no getting away from it... this passage is about sin.
But who wants another sermon on sin? Hands up!

The truth is, on lists of the most popular subjects for discussion, sin isn't going to come in the top ten!

But I want to persuade you this morning, that if we understand it properly, sin is actually one of the most releasing and practical concepts there is.

You see, without the concept of sin, what can be done about the problem of guilt?

Without an understanding of sin, how do we repent?

How do we get forgiven?

How can we be cleansed?

How can we deal with the things which enslave us and bind us?

The Bible says unless we understand sin, we'll never deal with these things

So, yes, this passage is about sin, but it's also about sin in a particular situation – at the Communion Table.

Now, one of the most famous pictures of all time is Leonardo Da Vinci's painting of the Last Supper – the very first Communion Service!

But as you may know, he has it completely wrong!

Instead of sitting, they'd all have been lying on couches with their heads towards the table and their feet pointing away from the table.

So, this means it was an incredibly intimate setting

And it's one of the reasons why, when we come to the Communion Table, it should be such a place of intimacy for us too.

So, why do you think it's in this particular setting Jesus brings up the subject of betrayal no less than three times?

(It's only twice in our passage but he's already referred to it in verse 11)

"I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray me." (v21)

Why does he keep bringing it up?

Well, one reason is because when Jesus comes to meet us at the Table, he won't overlook sin.

He's going to say something about it.

So, every time we come to Communion, we need to examine ourselves – just as Paul tells us to in 1 Corinthians 11.

We need to ask: “Lord, is it me? Am I the betrayer? Who is it? Is it me?”

And this passage suggests there’s two very important truths we should use to do this self-examination – two truths:

Firstly, sin is a betrayal of Jesus; and secondly, Jesus at his Table loves to melt – to woo – betrayers.

Sin is betrayal of Jesus

Okay firstly, this passage says sin is betrayal:

¹⁸ *“I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfil the scripture: ‘He who shares my bread has lifted up his heel against me.’*

Now there’s lots of ways the Bible talks about sin:

We’re given many different images or paradigms or models, of sin, and here’s another of them – betrayal

But what does the word betray actually mean?

Remember Joseph? He was an annoying little brother and all his older brothers hated him, so they betrayed him.

They sold him into slavery.

They got rid of him so they didn’t have to listen to his stupid stories any longer.

To betray means to take someone and to remove their power over you

To do something to prevent that power

To do something to neutralise it.

Now, we don’t actually know what Judas’ motives were, but perhaps it was because he felt Jesus’ claims to be King were dangerous.

Maybe he thought, “The Jewish independent movement is going to be ruined by his ridiculous claims of not just being a great leader, but the King of the universe, and the Judge of all the earth, and the cosmic Son of God. So, we need to remove him.”

Or maybe Judas was offended by Jesus’ claims of personal lordship over his individual life.

After all, Jesus doesn’t just say, “I’m your Teacher.”

He says, *“You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord’, and rightly so, for that is what I am.”* (v13)

Maybe Judas was wrestling with that and thinking, “Well, it’s one thing to be my teacher, but it’s another thing to say you’re also my Lord. No one has the right to tell me what to do!”

Okay, so let me ask you this: What does the Bible tell us is the essence of sin? What is it at its core? *<Ask congregation>*

I mean, is the essence of sin the violation of the Law?

Or murder, rape, robbery?

Well, of course these are sins – but the essence of sin is something more subtle, and more deep, and more profound.

The Bible says the essence of sin is to say to God, “I don’t need you, and I don’t want your interfering hands on my life. I want to get rid of the power you have over me.”

The prodigal son... Do you remember the prodigal son parable (Luke 15:11-32)?

What does the young man do?

He asks his father for his wealth now.

He says, “All I want you to do is give me what’s mine and then leave me alone.”

Sin is basically the determination to be independent of God.

“Get out of my life. This is my life.”

Now, when we say that to a person, it’s merely rude...

But if we say it to God (who after all is the source of that life), it’s the essence of sin.

When I was at BP, we increasingly made use of advisors and consultants.

But the problem with Jesus is he won’t stay merely in the role of an advisor or consultant!

He says, “I must be your Teacher and your Lord.”

Jesus says to Judas (and it’s what he says to us, especially when we come to the Communion Table):

“My dear friend, don’t you understand? I only want what’s best for you. But to get this you must obey. You can’t just pick and choose between my words, you’ve got to obey all of them. You must submit completely to my Word and my Spirit if you’re ever going to experience the true joy I have for you.”

But what does the human heart say in response?

It says: “Get away! I can’t breathe. I need my options open. I need my freedom.”

Look, remember who Judas was:

He wasn’t an outsider. He was part of the family!

He was a trusted member of Jesus’ Leadership Team.

He’d been with Jesus for three years – no doubt he’d heard all Jesus’ stories... several times!

It was like he was on the PCC!

So, if Judas could do what he did, do we really think we can’t betray Jesus – albeit in different ways?

Because what does it mean to betray Jesus?

Well, it’s about getting rid of our obligations to him – to the very person who’s given us everything in the first place!

It’s taking authority which isn’t ours – like when we try to live by our own rules rather than God’s

It’s assuming privileges we don’t have a right to – like when we expect God to answer our prayers in the way we want, even though we’ve been ignoring him a lot of the time

It's saying "Get out of my life," when we really owe him everything.

Look, let me tell you a story which might help with this:

There was a young couple who moved into a huge house, renting one room off an elderly lady who had no heirs, no children.

Now this lady didn't have either the physical ability, or the money to maintain the house.

And for many years people had been telling her: "You need to move out of that house. You need to sell it. It's dangerous for you to be there." But she wouldn't admit the truth of this.

Anyway, this young couple moved into the house and they lived there for 12 years as tenants. They had three children, and they all stayed in that one little room during those 12 years.

And they were so incredibly faithful to the lady:

They took care of her when she was sick.

They ran errands for her.

They maintained the house.

They repaired the house.

They improved the house.

In fact, there was no way she could have even stayed in the house without them, and yet she continued to keep them in that one strange little room.

After those 12 years, a distant cousin of hers came to town, saw the situation, and really gave her a sharp telling off. And so she came to this young couple with tears in her eyes and she said:

"You know what? I've been a fool. I now realise the only reason I've been able to live in this house is you. The only reason this house has any value to it is you. Otherwise it would have badly deteriorated.

Actually the only reason I'm even alive today is you."

"I realise I've made a complete mess of things. I realise I'm completely indebted to you. You've been so uncomplaining, and you've been so patient. In fact, your patience has melted my heart. I'm going to do what I should have done a long time ago. I'm going to do justice today. I give you the deeds to the ownership of this house."

"So, now you run this house. Let your family fill it up. Do with it what you want. Let the house be filled with your lives and with your joy.

And all I need, all I ever needed, was one room. Let me be your tenant. Let me live in this little room."

There was a lot of hugging and there was a lot of kissing and weeping. And the older lady felt the burden of the house at last fall off her back, as she admitted she couldn't run the house; as she acknowledged the fact this couple had earned the house – that this couple was owed the house.

What does it mean for us today to acknowledge our debt to our Creator? It means to come to Jesus and say:

"Lord Jesus, I'm sorry I've been rather half-hearted, at best, about having you in my life.

The truth is the only reason I'm alive today is because of you.
The only reason my life has any value is because of you.

My friends, when are we going to come to Jesus with tears in our eyes and say, "I owe you everything. I give you the whole house. Just let me stay on as tenant?"

Yes, Jesus deserves the whole house – not just the little room we've given him:
That little room, where, frankly, we can lock him in, whenever we'd rather not have him visible in our life.

Jesus loves to melt betrayers

Okay, so if sin is betrayal of Jesus (and we all sin), what can we expect from him, if we come to the Communion Table?

What do we expect?

Well, what does he do to Judas?

There's a betrayer at the table. What does he do?

Does he get up and say... Especially, for example, when John asks him, "*Lord, who is it?*" (v25)

Does Jesus get up and say, "Brothers, there's a traitor at the table. There's a foul smell here. There's a disease. There's a double-agent here.... And by the way, that's the man?" Is that what he does?

No! We're told Jesus does continually brings the subject up
We're told he personally serves Judas some bread – a significant action of love
But we're also told no one at the table knew who the traitor was.

So, why's Jesus so discreet?

Why's he so careful?

Why won't he tell anyone else?

Well, it's because he isn't trying to destroy Judas – he's trying to melt his heart, to woo him.
No, he isn't trying to condemn Judas – he's trying to convert him!
He isn't trying to keep Judas from joining in – he's trying to get Judas to understand what the meal means and what he's doing.

He's saying to Judas, "I see you and I love you. Come back to me."

Because Jesus always tries to woo us back – he never forces himself on us.

Look, when we play a board game with a young child, how do we do it?

The youngster starts to move and we say, "Oh! Hold on! Do you really want to make that move? Do you see what's going to happen if you move there? You'll be in trouble. Why don't you think again?"

What Jesus says to the betrayers at his Table is something similar:

He doesn't say, "Get out of my life."

He never treats us the way we treat him. Never!

What does he say? He says, "I see you. Do you really want to make that move – do that thing?"

And he does it in the most discreet way. He doesn't tell our friends.

It's time to be honest with ourselves:

Some of us will be coming to his Table with some pretty bad things in our life. Things we wouldn't want anyone else to know:

Like just how consumed with anger we are

Like just how envious of others we are

Like just how racked with guilt about something we are

Like that pornography we've just been watching.

Get this: he's not going to tell anyone. Okay?

He's the loving Saviour

He's here to melt us, to woo us, to change us.

He's saying, "I see you and I love you, and I want you to get rid of these things."

He isn't saying, "Don't partake...."

He's saying, "Understand what it means to partake. Drop the things in your life which are keeping you from full submission to my authority. After all, I am your life."

So, do we hear him this Advent Season? Are we listening to him?

Or are we blocking his messages of love to us?

Conclusion

Perhaps we're thinking, "I'm scared. I'm scared to really obey him, to really step out and obey him, and trust him today. I'm scared of it. I don't have the courage for it."

My friends, courage isn't the absence of fear.

Courage is the determination to do what we fear.

Jesus is saying, "I'll take you by the hand and I'll lead you right there. I'll be right alongside you."

So, what should we say to him today, as we begin our focus on Christmas? We should say: "Your love and patience has melted my heart. I deed to you the entire house – not just part of it.

I want this Christmas to be the best ever"

Let's pray.

Prayer