

Introduction

This morning we continue on our 2021 journey to the cross, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. We plan to arrive at the resurrection on the day of resurrection, April 4. Each week between now and then we will stop and consider various of the important events along the way in the final days of the earthly life of Jesus Christ. Center stage along this week's stretch of road is Jesus' observance of the Passover meal with his disciples. We begin in chapter 26 with verse 17 and read through verse 35.

[Read Text and Pray]

In the midst of his final evening with his disciples, Jesus shares the Passover meal with them. His time is at hand. He is the Passover lamb. And yet, during the Passover Jesus institutes the new covenant in his blood. The bread and the cup point to his body and blood. Through partaking of these ceremonial elements, Christ's disciples will call to mind his atoning sacrifice and will proclaim their faith in his sufficient provision for their sins. They will also look ahead with hope and anticipation to the day when they will share the memorial with Christ himself in his Father's kingdom.

But on either side of the institution of the Lord's Supper, Jesus draws attention to two sorrowful aspects of his looming sacrifice. He would be betrayed by one of his own disciples and he would be deserted by the rest. These were not mere possibilities but certainties. They weren't matters of "if" but "when." They highlight the fact that Jesus would be completely alone in his work of redemption. No one else could do it and no one else could help him. Part of his pain would be his betrayal and abandonment. So the main idea of this text is that Jesus would suffer and die ALONE. You may feel alone at times, but know this: no one was ever more alone than Jesus. He was tempted in all points as we are and yet without sin. And he is able to come to our aid. The manner in which I will preach this text to you this morning is to draw several important lessons from the events including and surrounding Jesus' observance of the Passover with his disciples.

The first lesson I want you to grasp is that . . .

I. God's sovereignty does not eliminate the guilt of sin.

When Jesus announced that one of his disciples would betray him, he said it with absolute assurance and convincing affirmation. He spoke as he did at other times when he wanted his listeners to be fully convinced. He said this kind of thing when there might be those who would doubt or dispute what he was saying or would find it hard to believe. The disciples had heard these words many times, and now Jesus says again, "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me." Clearly, they took him seriously. They were very sorrowful and began to say to him one after another, "Is it I, Lord?" The sad truth was, yes, indeed; one of those who had dipped his hand in the dish with Jesus would betray him.

It was shocking but true that one who appeared to be a friend, one who was close, someone who shared the common dish with them was to turn against Jesus. Then, to add further weight of certainty, Jesus said, "The Son of Man goes as it is written of him." This is not merely a prediction by Jesus. Here is an assertion that the word of God had indicated that Jesus would be crushed, smitten, afflicted, grieved, pierced, and killed. And the word of God cannot be broken. It would most certainly take place in accord with what God's word had declared.

And yet God's ordination of Christ's death would not excuse the evil committed by those who played a part in bringing it about. For Jesus declares as a warning as well as a fact, "It would have been better for the betrayer if he had not been born." God's sovereign rule over the circumstances does not cause Judas to do something he does not want to do. The fact that God meant it for good does not erase the fact that evil was in the heart of Judas. And Jesus forewarns that he would be punished severely for that evil.

In Romans 9 Paul discusses God's sovereignty and human guilt. He is explaining that God's choice to have mercy on whom he will is the only explanation for his blessing. There is no injustice on God's part when God withholds mercy. He is not obligated to show mercy to anyone. He gives it freely. And when he withholds mercy, he is just. God does not compel people from the outside to do evil. But he will give them over to what is already on the inside so that the result is more evil. Turning them over is simply the retraction of restraining mercy, which God is under no obligation to give anyone or it would not be mercy but entitlement.

Never think the evil you do will simply be excused because God is sovereign. God may permit a person to drift further into sin, but the sin is not God's fault. When you do evil, it is because you desire to do that evil. It is in compliance with your will not in contradiction to it. Never think that you do not have a choice. And yet it is the wonder of God's providence that he utilizes the evil intents of human hearts as they act according to the evil wishes of their hearts to accomplish his own purposes. God is not to blame that he accomplishes good for his glory and for the people upon whom he has set his love while allowing evil and while enduring with patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction. What we see in Judas is a hardened determination to do the evil he had planned. The stern wording that it would be better if he had not been born didn't even phase him. The Lord graciously warned him, but he continued forward in his own evil intent. When the Lord graciously warns you, remember Judas! Give thanks for the warning. Repent. Turn back!

A second important lesson is that . . .

II. Imposters invade the people of God.

There will be those among Christ's disciples who for a time look like they belong, talk like they belong, and act like they belong, but who in actuality do not belong. They are not true followers of Jesus Christ. John put it this way, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us." Jesus spoke of those who might appear to belong to the people of God but whose failure to persevere would demonstrate that they were not in the kingdom. Some who hear the gospel are like shallow soil. The seed shoots up suddenly and they are even emotional in their excitement about the gospel, but the gospel makes it no further in their lives than the veneer of their emotions. For when the hard realities of the gospel present themselves, these fall away. Others who hear and respond to the gospel are like soil infested with thorns. They receive it but their love for other things chokes it out. They too prove unfruitful. The deceitfulness of riches choked out the word in Judas's case. He looked like the other disciples. He even talked like the other disciples. They were all saying, "Is it I?" He too asked, "Is it I?" But notice the text. They were all asking, "Is it I, Lord?" But Judas said, "Is it I, Rabbi?" He sounded like the other disciples, but he wasn't willing to call Jesus Lord. He was an imposter.

Judas' betrayal is a warning to us all as are numerous passages in the Bible. These texts mercifully inform us that there are those who have been granted the knowledge of the truth and who have drawn near to God, but who ultimately reject the Lord. In the words of Hebrews 10, They "go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth," and "there no longer remains a

sacrifice for [their] sins." What they have is not the hope of salvation "but a fearful expectation of judgment and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries" because they trample underfoot the Son of God and profane the covenant. Do not be one of these! Be warned. This destiny is dreadful indeed. On the one hand followers of Christ can be assured that he will hold us fast, but we should not be presumptive to think that we can live in complete defiance to Christ and still be his disciple. So do what Peter urges and "be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election" (2 Peter 1:10).

The sorrow of the disciples when they learned that one of them would betray the Lord speaks to us as well. It is a hard reality for Christians that there are some who come in, with whom we share our lives, with whom we pray and serve and fellowship for a time but who ultimately wander away. They come in and taste the heavenly gift, experience the power of the Spirit, and taste the goodness of the word of God and the power of God but then depart. This reality is painful and sorrowful even as Jesus's disciples were filled with sorrow that such a thing could be true of one who had dipped his hand in the dish with them that very night.

King David expressed this sorrow in Psalm 55. He wrote that his heart was in anguish. He said, "terrors of death have fallen upon me. Fear and trembling come upon me, and horror overwhelms me. And I say, 'Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest; yes, I would wander far away; I would lodge in the wilderness; I would hurry to find shelter from the raging wind and tempest.'" . . . "For it is not an enemy who taunts me—then I could bear it; it is not an adversary who deals insolently with me—then I could hide from him. But it is you, a man, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend. We used to take sweet counsel together; within God's house we walked in the throng." Later he says, "My companion stretched out his hand against his friends; he violated his covenant. His speech was smooth as butter, yet war was within his heart; his words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords" (Psalm 55:4-8; 12-14; 20-21).

Doing church biblically is not easy. It is not without tears and pain. It is not without struggle. And it is not without friends who once shared joyfully in sweet communion who now pierce your heart with deep sorrows because they turn against the Lord and depart from him. We need to be ready and willing to endure the hurt. We need to be determined to love the church. It is not all hurt. In fact there is much joy and gladness when the church follows her Lord. But when those times come when there is pain and disappointment because of certain ones who rebel against the Lord and when certain ones fall away, just remember Jesus and his disciples felt it too. We must go on.

We come to a third important lesson.

III. The Destiny of Unforgiven Sinners Is Dreadful.

Jesus taught about hell more than any other person in the Bible and he warned of hell more than he talked about heaven. He described hell as a fiery furnace where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 13:42). He also called it the outer darkness (Matthew 25:30) and Gehenna (Matthew 10:28), a trash dump outside the walls of Jerusalem whose fire burned around the clock. Hell is a place of unquenchable fire (Mark 9:43) where the worm does not die and the fire is never quenched (Mark 9:48). It is a place of agony where sinners receive the wrath they deserve from God for their sins. Dreadfully, hell is as real as it gets. You do not want to go to hell. It would have been better not to have been born than to go to hell. And hell is real; it is not a figment of a demented imagination. Rather it is a reality of the universe created by God who is holy, holy, holy, who will not leave the guilty unpunished. Jesus exclaimed, "Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment" (John 5:38-39).

Hell is what Jesus has in mind when he says, "woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born."

For Judas, who betrayed Jesus, and for every unconverted sinner, the destiny is dreadfully the same—divine damnation. God is holy. He cannot and will not simply sweep the sins of people under the rug. Wrath is due to those who sin because sin is a violation of the holiness of God. And justice calls for consequences of punishment for sinners. And the intensity of the consequences of judgment match the intensity of the crime committed when creatures sin against the God who made them. The Bible is clear that the Lake of Fire awaits sinners on the day of judgment. It is an experience of conscious and endless torment. It is a prison of pain from which there is no escape, not ever. The smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever. The pictures given to us in scripture should curdle the blood in our veins. They should send shockwaves from the crown of our heads to the soles of our feet. It is not cruel to warn of hell. It is basic compassion. It is staggering to be present at a funeral and hear loved ones hiding behind the presumption that everybody goes to heaven when they die. It is not so. If that were so, what Jesus said here about Judas would be a lie.

J. C. Ryle said it well. "It is better never to live at all than to live without faith and die without grace. To die in this state is to be ruined forevermore. It is a fall from which there is no rising. It is a loss which is utterly irrevocable. There is no change in hell. The gulf between hell and heaven is one that no man can pass." "Except a man be born again, he will wish one day he had never been born at all."

Judas had heard about being born again, but it never happened to him. Had he been born again he would not have betrayed the Lord. When he went and killed himself, he did not make matters better for himself. Death is no escape from eternal punishment. The only way to live so that it will have been good that you were born is to live by the Spirit of God, to be born again, born from above. Now, while that is something only God can do, if you desire to be born again and you desire the hope of those who are born again, you need to turn from yourself and living for yourself, your life your rules; you must repent and you must trust in the work of Christ by his death and resurrection that he has satisfied the demands of God's justice for you.

You see if you look to verses 26-29, you see that Jesus established the new covenant in his blood. And he gave the Lord's Supper as a memorial to his death by which the sins of those who trust in Christ are forgiven. Jesus declared, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." I can assure you that if you truly repent and trust in Jesus Christ, you have already been born of God. And you need not fear regretting being born. You have the assurance of a dwelling place with Christ rather than the lake of fire for all eternity.

And so we come to lesson number 4.

IV. There is good news for those who desert Jesus.

There wasn't good news for the betrayer, but there is good news for the deserters. Look with me at verses 30-32. They sang a hymn and went out from the Passover to the Mount of Olives. There Jesus unloaded some more bad news on the disciples. He said, "You will ALL fall away because of me this night. For it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will all be scattered.'"

Just as surely as one of the disciples would betray the Lord, all the rest of them would desert him. It was just as certain because, as Jesus pointed out, it was written. So where is the good news in this announcement? All of them will scatter from the Lord? Yes, Jesus was alerting the disciples in advance that they surely would desert him at his most trying hour. But there is good news. The good news is what Jesus would do. He said, "But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee." The good news is two fold. First, though he would be struck, he would be raised. And second, though the disciples would desert Jesus, he would not desert them. He would go before them. On the other side of their desertion and his death, they would reunite in Galilee, their old stomping grounds. How different this is from the warning Jesus gave Judas. Woe was unto Judas. But hope was unto these disciples. It is such good news to know that Jesus does not abandon his sheep even though his sheep at times abandon him.

Every single one of us deserts the Lord. We desert him when we sin. We abandon him when we fail to speak his name. Whenever fear takes over and we divert from the path of trusting and following and obeying the Lord, we portray the scattering of these disciples. We fail him. We sin against him. It is not alright. It is not a small thing. It is an alarming and disheartening failure to fail to honor our mighty and merciful savior. But though we behave faithlessly, he remains faithful. Jesus was intent to communicate to his disciples that though he was headed to the cross and his most trying moments on earth, while he was going to the cross to die for them, he would not disown them, even though they abandon him at his lowest. Every disciple of Christ needs this kind of reminder from time to time. The Lord is aware that we are but dust. He knows in advance every point at which our weaknesses and imperfections and corruptions will be made known, but these are the reasons why he went outside the city of Jerusalem to be nailed on a cross. This is why he absorbed the wrath of the Father. This is why he shed his blood . . . for the FORGIVENESS of sins. Christ's followers need this reminder every single day. Our sins they are many; his mercy is more. We don't get into heaven because we do not sin. We get into heaven because his mercy is greater than our sins. And his sacrifice satisfies what God's justice demands.

Here is one last lesson.

V. The Outcome of Self-Confidence is Disastrous.

Self-confidence will not keep you from falling but will pretty much insure it. Peter is full of blind self-confidence in response to Jesus's announcement. He exhibits pride as well. He answered, "Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away." Talk about thinking more highly of yourself than you ought! "Not me! No Never! They might desert you but not me! I am better and stronger and more determined than that!" It is not the first time we have seen Peter in conflict with Jesus. Jesus tells him with that familiar authoritative assurance, "Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." But Peter declares, "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!" And all the disciples said the same.

We need to think for a moment. If Peter and James and John and Andrew, Matthew and Bartholomew and Simon and Philip, Thaddaeus, the other James and Thomas all vowed on the basis of their own confidence about themselves that they would not deny the Lord but did, what do you think is the possibility that you are going to be able to stay faithful to Christ in your own strength?

These guys teach us an important lesson about sin and self-confidence. The lesson is not to think that you are above committing any sin, because you and I are not. We are who we are by grace. At the core of our being we are no better than the worst sinner. And there is nothing that we are above being tempted to do. The person who is in the most vulnerable position is the person who talks like Peter and the disciples talked that night. "I would never." Don't say that. Don't think you

are better or stronger. 1 Corinthians 10:12 is where Paul says, "let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall." The Bible warns us to beware for a reason. We are weak and we are vulnerable and the devil is prowling around seeking prey to devour. If you and I are to withstand the flaming darts of the evil one, it will not be in our own strength. WE are not better than this! It will not be because we are confident in our own strength. It will be because we are conscious of our weaknesses and walk in the power of him who alone withstood the assault of the evil one with full victory. He it is who is in us and is greater than he that is in the world.

Conclusion

Do you ever feel betrayed and abandoned? Ever feel alone? Jesus certainly experienced it. When we feel that way, we tend to feel sorry for ourselves and excuse misbehavior and distrust. The final picture I would place in your minds this morning is a Savior who even when betrayed and deserted would not desert the ones he came to save or the One who sent him to be the Savior. He was faithful, fully faithful, and faithful even to death on a cross. Disciples, follow in those footsteps by the power he supplies in your life.

Prayer

Reminder, the chairs must come up today. Any assistance toward that end would be appreciated. The Lord Jesus Christ shed his own blood for many for the forgiveness of sins. By that blood he instituted the New Covenant. May He be your hope and joy and Lord. May you live to honor and glorify him. And may his face shine upon you and give you peace.