

## **B. Exposing the Betrayer (13:21-30)**

Jesus' act of washing the disciples' feet was a powerful exposition of love as it truly is, and He intended this tangible explanation to inform the apostles' interpretation of the next day's horrific events. What would appear to them to be the most hideous and humiliating defeat imaginable would actually be the pinnacle of Jesus' triumph – the supreme triumph of love. By His cross, Jesus would show the world of men that their conception of authority and power reflects the curse of human alienation and the satanic mind. Human kingship and all human kingdoms are antithetical to their divine counterparts because they are devoid of the divine life and love. The foot-washing episode was a glimpse into authority, power, and dominion as God knows and administers them and as they would obtain their superlative expression in the Messiah's cross.

Thus Jesus' foot-washing demonstrated the way power and authority operate in His kingdom – the kingdom He came to establish in Himself (Mark 1:14-15); the kingdom which embodies His Father's everlasting rule over His restored, glorified creation. His kingdom and rule are defined by self-giving love, and John punctuated this by juxtaposing it with the self-serving, destructive machinations of the satanic world ruler; even while Jesus was washing His disciples' feet, Satan was exercising his antithetical power toward his own opposing ends. And the focal point of this divine-satanic conflict was Judas Iscariot, one of Jesus' inner circle of disciples.

1. Jesus had chosen Judas to be one of His apostles just as the others, but he was to serve a different role in His messianic work and its fruit in the world. Scholars debate the timing of Jesus' cognizance of this dynamic: Did He know Judas' role when He called him, or did He come to discern that role as time went along and the satanic design was exposed? Obviously the Father knew Judas as the betrayer all along, else how could the Scripture predict him (cf. Matthew 26:21-24; Luke 22:21-22)? But John's account suggests that Jesus also was aware of Judas' role when He called him. In the sense of being one of His Twelve, Judas was a chosen apostle just like the others; but in terms of his apostolic role, he didn't share his counterparts' election. Jesus chose Judas with a view to a distinct function within His purposes (cf. 6:66-71 with 13:18; ref. also Acts 1:15-26).

Judas' role in the divine purpose was preordained, but that didn't alter the fact that it was both willful and lamentable. From the one side, the satanic power merely played on an existing disposition and receptivity; from the other side, the divine design worked through a free and uncoerced human determination. God no more compelled Judas to betray Jesus than He compelled Satan to sway his judgment. Jesus brought Judas into His inner circle and engaged him in His ministration just like his eleven counterparts. By Peter's own admission, Judas was "counted among us and received his portion in this ministry," yet chose to "turn aside from his apostleship and ministry" (Acts 1:17, 24-25). From the beginning, Jesus reckoned Judas among His Twelve, interacting with him and ministering to him the same as the other apostles. Yes, He knew the part Judas was to play in His work, but this didn't make it any easier; He found no delight in this man's deception and destruction. When the hour finally arrived and the power of darkness overcame him, Jesus was deeply troubled in His spirit. Sharing His Father's mind and heart and loving intent for His human creatures, He took no pleasure in the death of this man who'd walked with Him these three years (Ezekiel 18:31-32, 33:10-11).

2. Judas was among Jesus' closest disciples and his decision, under satanic influence, to betray Him was deeply troubling. He'd enjoyed the same intimacy with Him as the other eleven apostles and experienced His loving care and ministrations. Moreover, he'd been party to Jesus' messianic self-disclosure in word and deed; if anyone in Israel had reason to believe Jesus was Yahweh's promised Messiah, Judas was certainly one such individual. Yet now he'd come to the decision to hand Him over to His adversaries.

Scholars and Christians through the centuries have speculated concerning Judas' thinking and motivation and the biblical records provide little direct insight. However, Judas' reaction after betraying Jesus suggests that he didn't know (or didn't want to know) the Jews' intent for Him (cf. Matthew 27:1-5). It's possible he believed, or was led to believe, that the authorities only sought an audience with Him, perhaps to more closely scrutinize His messianic claims or even convince Him to lay low in view of the Roman threat. Like every Israelite, Judas was well aware of how Rome handled alleged messiahs and their followers and he may have believed he was actually preventing Jesus' death by his actions. Of course, the thirty pieces of silver incentivized his decision, but that cannot have been his ultimate motive (cf. 12:4-6 and Mark 14:10-11 with Matthew 27:1-5).

Whatever Judas' thinking and conviction, Jesus regarded his decision with anguished sorrow – not because it would bring about His suffering and death, but because He sincerely cared for Judas (as He cares for every human being) and understood the gravity of this outcome. Though scripted into the divine plan, Judas' decision and act were grave indeed and incurred an immense weight of condemnation (ref. Matthew 26:24).

- a. When Jesus disclosed to the Twelve that one of them was going to betray Him, their immediate response was to question who that person was. Comparing the four gospel accounts, it seems their thoughts first turned to themselves (“Is it I?”) and then to one another (cf. 13:21-22 with Matthew 26:21-22; Mark 14:18-19; Luke 22:21-23). John's account indicates that, in the midst of this confusion and questioning, Peter gestured to him (John is traditionally identified as the disciple “whom Jesus loved” – a self-description highlighting his awe and amazed gratitude at Jesus' love for him; cf. 19:26, 20:2, 21:7, 20 with 19:26-35 and 21:20-24), as he reclined beside Jesus, to find out who the betrayer was (13:23-25).
- b. John inquired of Jesus and He replied that He'd identify this man by handing him a bread morsel (13:26). The gospel writers differ in their accounts of this (cf. Matthew 26:23 and Mark 14:20), but all of the versions tie Jesus' identification of Judas with His sharing a dipped morsel with him. This identifying gesture wasn't arbitrary, but chosen by the Lord to connect Judas and his betrayal with the Scriptures and messianic (here, Davidic) prophecy (ref. 13:18; cf. Psalm 41). This action, along with Jesus' reply to Judas' question (Matthew 26:23-25), openly identified him as the betrayer, but John suggests that the other apostles somehow missed it (13:27-29). Perhaps they simply couldn't bring themselves to believe this of Judas; he clearly enjoyed a unique standing and respect among the Twelve, being entrusted with keeping the group's funds. Indeed, that very night he received the honor, along with John, of being seated beside the Lord at the meal.

These observations underscore the important truth that Jesus did not in any way distinguish Judas in His interaction with him or treatment of him. Even though He knew Judas would one day betray Him and deliver Him over to death, the Lord embraced him with the same sincere and intimate affection as the other apostles. The clearest proof of this equal regard is the fact that none of the Twelve suspected Judas when Jesus spoke of a betrayer in their ranks. They had no idea that Judas was that man because their Lord had never given them a reason to mark him out or suspect him of unfaithfulness.

3. John recorded that, after Jesus handed Judas the dipped morsel, Satan entered into him – evidently for the purpose of strengthening his resolve. It would be deeply unnerving to be exposed in this way and Judas’ first instinct would have been to shrink back from his commitment. But God’s purposes and the satanic adversary who served them were not to be thwarted, and thus Satan made sure of his chosen instrument. So Jesus, discerning what was happening, added His own amen to Judas’ designs: “*What you do, do quickly*” (13:27). The other apostles observed Jesus’ instruction, but didn’t grasp His meaning. Again, something in the situation clouded their understanding; they had asked Jesus who His betrayer was and He’d answered their request, yet now, as He sent Judas out to complete his task, they were confused about his departure (13:28-29).

John concluded this context with the poignant summary, “*and it was night*” (13:30). On one level he was describing the physical scene: Night had come and darkness had fallen by the time Judas left the room. But night and darkness are important metaphors in John’s gospel, especially as antitheses of light and day: The former connote the realm and principles which inform and govern human beings and the non-human creation in their alienation from the God who is light (cf. 1:1-14, 3:19-21, 8:12, 9:1-5, 11:6-10, 12:20-46; cf. also Matthew 4:1-17, 8:1-12; 2 Corinthians 4:1-6; Ephesians 5:1-14; 1 John 2:1-11). So darkness is the realm presided over by the satanic powers (Colossians 1:13-14). Thus John’s ultimate meaning was that Judas’ departure to carry out his task meant that the hour of darkness and its power had arrived (Luke 22:47-53). Now the dark forces would do their worst to crush the light and eliminate the possibility of a new creational “day.”

Only Luke among the four gospel writers recorded the dissension which followed upon Jesus’ announcement of a betrayer (ref. Luke 22:21-30), but because of its relevance to the circumstance in the Upper Room it is worthwhile to consider it briefly. This dissension arose after Jesus spoke of a betrayer, but also, according to Luke, after He had reinterpreted and reinstated the Passover in terms of Himself and the work He was about to do (22:14-20; cf. Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25). This is important because it shows that the apostles failed to grasp what was taking place: Their Lord, by washing their feet, had shown that power and authority function as self-giving love in His kingdom, and then He’d connected the coming of this kingdom with a new Passover and exodus effected by His own supreme act of sacrificial love. Moreover, Jesus had confronted them with a betrayer in their number, thus contrasting His love with its antithesis at work among them. *Yet, for all this, they responded with the very pattern of human existence and thinking that He was exposing, condemning and giving Himself to conquer by His love.* The profound irony of that moment was that the human paradigm driving the disciples to distinguish and promote themselves as greatest was the very thing which indicted their discipleship and necessitated Jesus’ impending lesson in true greatness (cf. Mark 10:35-45).