

John 13:18-30

Introduction

John introduces the second half of his Gospel with these words:

- John 13:1 — Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of *this world* to the Father, having loved *His own* who were in *the world*, He loved them to the end.

We've seen that there's a careful distinction, here, between "the world" and "His own" who were "*in the world*." It's the ones who were "His own" that Jesus loved in a special way. It's the ones who were "His own"—the ones whom the Father had given to Him from "out of" the world—that Jesus loved to the uttermost. It's this special love for "His own" that takes front and center stage now and that we've begun to see already here in chapter thirteen.

We've seen Jesus take to Himself the dress of a slave and perform the work of a slave, washing the feet of His disciples. He's assured His disciples that they're "clean" and told them that they are to do to each other as He has done to them. He's spoken of His disciples as the ones who are "sent" by Him, and encouraged them that if they "know these things," they are "blessed if [they] do them." But all the while, there's an underlying tension. Back in verse two, in the verse that introduced this section, John said:

- John 13:2 — During supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Him...

Where does Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon "*fit*"? Is he one of Jesus' "*own*"? Obviously, he's not (cf. Jn. 17:12). Is he a part of the "world"? But if he belongs to the world, then why is he here, even among the innermost circle of "the twelve"? Why is Judas here, in the upper room, having his feet washed by Jesus and even eating the Passover meal with Jesus? We remember verses 10-11:

- John 13:10-11 — Jesus said to [Peter], "He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you [pl., 'you men; you disciples'] are clean, but not all of you." For He *knew* the one who was betraying Him; for this reason He said, "Not all of you are clean."

And now Jesus says, again, in verse 18:

I. John 13:18a — "I do not speak of all of you. I know the ones I have chosen;"

There is one of the twelve, one of those sitting at the table with Him, "of whom" and even "to whom" Jesus is not speaking – to whom His words do not apply. Here Jesus is with "his own," loving them "to the end"—to the uttermost—and yet among "His own" there's an imposter – a betrayer. Jesus knows this.

“I *know* the ones I have *chosen*.” This isn’t the sovereign, unconditional election unto salvation. Jesus isn’t saying: “I know the ones I have chosen, and Judas is not one of those people. What He’s saying is that He “knows” the heart of each and every man that He has “chosen” to be among that inner circle of His disciples. On the one hand, yes, He *chose Judas*, but on the other hand, He also *knows* Judas. Jesus said in chapter six:

➤ John 6:70 — “Did I Myself not *choose* you, the twelve, and yet one of you is the *devil*?”

How can this be? How can Jesus know that Judas is “the devil” and yet purposefully, consciously, knowingly “choose” him to be numbered among the twelve? And yet for Jesus, it’s of the utmost importance that we *know* this is exactly what He did. Why? Did Jesus choose Judas because this was the only way to the crucifixion? Was this just a “necessary evil” to gain the “required” end? Not at all. There could have been many other paths and many other ways to the cross without ever needing to be betrayed by one of the twelve. This *choosing* of Judas, therefore, was not just a “necessary evil”; it was in some way a unique manifestation of God’s good and wise and redemptive purposes. But how can this be? Jesus goes on to say in verse eighteen:

II. John 13:18b — “...but it is that the Scripture may be fulfilled, ‘HE WHO EATS MY BREAD HAS LIFTED UP HIS HEEL AGAINST ME.’”

What’s really the point of this quotation? Is Jesus saying that a betrayer was chosen to be among the twelve “only” so that the Word of God would not be proved false? Is this just a historical detail that had to happen just because the Scriptures said it “had” to happen? In other words, is this just an apologetic argument for the accuracy and reliability of the Bible? But that won’t work at all. If Jesus had *not* been betrayed by one of the twelve, there still would have been no doubt cast upon the reliability of the Scriptures. The passage Jesus quotes is from Psalm forty-one, a psalm of David.

➤ Psalm 41:4–12 — As for me, I said, “O LORD, be gracious to me; heal me, for I have sinned against you!” My enemies say of me in malice, “When will he die, and his name perish?” And when one comes to see me, he utters empty words, while his heart gathers iniquity; when he goes out, he tells it abroad. All who hate me whisper together about me; they imagine the worst for me. They say, “A deadly thing is poured out on him; he will not rise again from where he lies.” Even my close friend in whom I trusted, **who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me** [this may be an expression that derives from the horse lifting up the heel to kick]. But you, O LORD, be gracious to me, and raise me up, that I may repay them! By this I know that you delight in me: my enemy will not shout in triumph over me. But you have upheld me because of my integrity, and set me in your presence forever.

Can you see how these words of David don’t depend in any way for their accuracy and authenticity upon a “fulfillment” in the life of Jesus? There’s no direct prophecy here at all. They’re completely “true” and historically reliable whether Jesus is betrayed by Judas or not. So now we have to ask: What is the significance of these words being “fulfilled”—or “filled up”—in the life of Jesus? What is it about the experience of David that helps us to understand *why* his experience should be “fulfilled” in the experience of Jesus? Jesus continues in verses 19-20.

III. John 13:19–20 — “From now on I am telling you before it comes to pass, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am He. Truly, truly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.”

Again, what is Jesus saying? Is He saying merely that His “powers of prediction” should convince us of His deity (“I am He”; *ego eimi*)? Is He saying merely that His “powers of prediction” should convince us that whoever receives Him receives the Father who sent Him and that He is therefore the true revelation of God? There has to be more to it than this! What is it about this coming betrayal by Judas and what is it about Jesus’ “prediction” of this betrayal by Judas that will nourish and strengthen the faith of His disciples not just in an empty fact or doctrine but in the reality of His person as the revelation of God and the only Savior? We go on to read in verse 21:

IV. John 13:21 — When Jesus had said this, He became troubled [*tarasso*] in spirit, and testified and said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, that one of you will betray Me.”

“When Jesus had said”—*what?* When Jesus had spoken of the one who ate His bread lifting up his heel against Him— when Jesus had said *this*, He became troubled in spirit. He was distressed and in turmoil. His spirit was in an upheaval (cf. Jn. 5:4).

How did John know what was happening in Jesus’ spirit? He speaks as if Jesus’ distress was something visible to all the disciples – something he can recall from His own memory. When Jesus had said this, He became troubled in spirit, *and testified and said*, “Truly, truly, I say to you, that one of you will betray Me.” The distress of Jesus’ spirit was somehow displayed for His disciples to see in these words that He spoke. It’s true, Jesus is telling Judas that He *knows*. It’s true, Jesus wants to make sure that the disciples remember later that He *knew*. But this isn’t just a formal pronouncement. Part of the reason Jesus says what He says is because the very thing that He speaks of is causing Him so much distress and turmoil. “Truly, truly, I say to you, that one of you will betray Me.” Can we ever really fully comprehend the pain and the suffering behind those words? It was in the speaking of these words, though the disciples couldn’t yet understand their true meaning, that the disciples could see clearly how distressed and troubled Jesus was. If anything should have moved Judas to repent of his purpose, it should have been this; it should have been this revelation that Jesus *knew* of his plan, and it should have been this revelation of the *distress* in His spirit. In verse eighteen Jesus quoted from Psalm forty-one. It’s in the next two psalms (Psalm 42 and 43) that David speaks of his soul being troubled and distressed especially because of the persecution and mockery of his enemies.

- **Psalm 42:3, 5–6, 9–11 (cf. 43:1–5)** — My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all the day long, “Where is your God?” ... Why are you cast down, O my *soul*, and why are you [**troubled/distressed**; Gr. *syntarasso*] within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God. My *soul* is [**troubled/distressed**; Gr. *tarasso*] within me; therefore I remember you... I say to God, my rock: “Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?” As with a deadly wound in my bones, my adversaries taunt me, while they say to me all the day long, “Where is your God?” Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you [**troubled/distressed**; Gr. *syntarasso*] within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.

If David's soul was "distressed" at the persecution and mockery of his declared enemies, how much more distress would he feel at the betrayal of someone who was his most intimate companion? How much more distressed must Jesus have been as He looked around the table on that night and knew that one of these men who was closest to Him and who professed to be among His most devoted followers was even at that moment planning to betray Him? Jesus wasn't "dependent" upon His disciples; but in His humanity, He wasn't above feeling the pain and suffering of human betrayal. And this betrayal, we remember, will be a purposeful and ultimate betrayal even to death. John now continues to describe the scene:

V. John 13:22–25 — The disciples began looking at one another, at a loss to know of which one He was speaking. There was reclining on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved. So Simon Peter gestured to him, and said to him, "Tell us who it is of whom He is speaking." He, leaning back thus on Jesus' bosom, said to Him, "Lord, who is it?"

It was the custom at special meals—such as this Passover meal was—to eat reclining on the floor with your left elbow resting on a cushion, with your feet stretched out at an angle away from the "table," and therefore with your face to the back of the person to your right and your back turned toward the face of the person on your left. This explains how Jesus could so easily wash all the disciples' feet. This also explains the expression, "there was reclining on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples..." This is just a reference to the person reclining on Jesus' right, with his back facing Jesus' front (in other words, "on his bosom").

Back in our first message on John, we saw that this disciple "whom Jesus loved" is none other than John himself, the one recounting these things to us. John delighted to remain "anonymous" and at the same time to speak of himself only as "*the disciple whom Jesus loved*" (cf. 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20). When John reflects back on the distress of Jesus that he witnessed and how Jesus "loved His own" to the end (13:1), that's the only thing that matters to him – that he, an unworthy sinner, had been loved—and was still loved—by Jesus. It's the very one recounting to us what happened that night who was reclining to Jesus' right, with his back toward Jesus.

"The disciples began looking at one another," John tells us, "at a loss to know of which one He was speaking. We see Jesus occupied with His inner turmoil and distress while the disciples exchange quiet looks of confusion. They have no idea who this disciple could be. In all their time together they've noticed nothing that would give him away. Judas has deceived everyone but Jesus. The disciples still aren't even thinking of a purposeful betrayal, but at most of something unintentional and accidental.

"Simon Peter gestured to [that disciple who was reclining on Jesus' bosom, whom Jesus loved], and said to him, 'Tell us who it is of whom He is speaking.'" The fact that Peter motioned to John to get his attention tells us that he must also have been close enough to whisper his question or else that he mouthed it silently. So the disciple whom Jesus loved, "leaning back thus on Jesus' bosom [leaning back toward Jesus and turning round so as to face Him], said to Him, 'Lord, who is it?'"

VI. John 13:26 — Jesus then answered, “That is the one for whom I shall dip the morsel and give it to him.” So when He had dipped the morsel, He took and gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot.

Jesus does this not with any cool detachment; He does this even while His spirit is in upheaval – troubled, distressed, in turmoil.

As Jesus dips the morsel and gives it to Judas we’re reminded again of Jesus’ words in verse eighteen: “...but it is that the Scripture may be fulfilled, ‘**HE WHO EATS MY BREAD HAS LIFTED UP HIS HEEL AGAINST ME.**’” “What is the significance of these words being *fulfilled*—or “filled up”—in the life of Jesus? The emphasis of the psalmist is on the extremity of his suffering. The emphasis of the psalmist is on that excruciating grief and pain of being hated and betrayed even by that “close friend in whom [David] trusted.” David writes in another place:

- Psalm 55:12–14, 20–21 — 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... My companion stretched out his hand against his friends; he violated his covenant. His speech was smooth as butter, yet war was in his heart; his words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords.

In Psalm 41 David said: “**Even my close friend in whom I trusted**, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me.” Jesus purposefully skips the first part of this sentence (“even my close friend in whom I trusted”) and quotes only the second half: “He who eats my bread has lifted up his heel against me.” But those first words are still important for helping us understand *why* Jesus quotes this passage at all and *why* this passage must be filled up in Him. Judas may not have been Jesus’ close friend in whom He trusted, but Jesus did always treat Judas *as* His close friend in whom He trusted—*as* one of the twelve; and He did this without deceit and without any insincerity. We see this even now as Jesus dips the morsel and gives it to Judas. We see this in the total confusion and bafflement of the disciples who have never seen any hint of a difference in Jesus’ treatment of Judas. David could never say, “I know the ones I have chosen,” but Jesus could. Jesus knew from the beginning who Judas was, and yet He never ceased to treat him with all sincerity as one whom He Himself had *chosen*. And so for Jesus, this can only intensify further the grief and the pain of Judas’ betrayal. Judas must have joined the disciples in the beginning with a real “sincerity” – even if it was ultimately misguided. And then whatever the reasons, and whatever the process by which Judas got to where he did, his speech always remained “smoother than butter” and his words “softer than oil,” so that no one ever knew; no one could have ever suspected. Only Jesus knew. And He knew all along.

Why does the experience of David need to be “fulfilled” in the experience of Jesus? Why must the path that Jesus takes to the cross be the path of betrayal by one of His most intimate companions? This was in order that He might be to the uttermost that great high priest who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses because He has been in every respect tempted (tried and tested) as we are, yet without sin (Heb. 4:15). Jesus experienced not only the persecution of His enemies but even the betrayal of His most intimate companion and He endured these griefs without sin in order that He might be both our Savior and our example.

He really did enter completely into all our sorrows; He really did experience every pain and every grief that we can know. If anything should have moved Judas to repent of his purpose, it should have been this; it should have been this revelation that Jesus *knew* of his plan; it should have been this revelation of the *distress* in Jesus' spirit; it should have been Jesus' continued (external but sincere; cf. 17:9) treatment of Judas even now—even to the very last—as though he really were one of his own. But the heart of Judas was hardened, and so we read in verse 27:

VII. John 13:27 — After the morsel, Satan then entered into him. Therefore Jesus said to him, “What you do, do quickly.”

Here is the mystery of absolute sovereignty and infinite love. Jesus doesn't say this to Judas with cool detachment; He says this to Judas while His spirit is in turmoil. But He also says this to Judas as the one who chose Judas with this very end in view, as the one who even now bears Judas no personal ill-will (cf. Mat. 26:50), and as the one who—knowing that His hour has now come—Himself releases Judas to do what he has purposed and even exhorts Judas, in light of the lateness of the evening, to do what he does quickly.

Now we can see even in the betrayal of Jesus a revelation of His deity, of His sovereignty, and of His saving power and love. “From now on I am telling you before it comes to pass, so that when it does occur, you may believe that *I am He* [*ego eimi*].”

VIII. John 13:28–30 — Now no one of those reclining at the table knew for what purpose [Jesus] had said this to [Judas]. For some were supposing, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus was saying to him, “Buy the things we have need of for the feast”; or else, that he should give something to the poor. So after receiving the morsel he went out immediately; and it was night.

Judas went out not only into the physical darkness of night, but into that ultimate spiritual darkness where he will stumble and fall to his own destruction. “If anyone walks in the night,” Jesus said, “he stumbles, because the light is not in him” (Jn. 11:10; cf. 9:4; 1:5; 3:19; 8:12; 12:35, 46). But now that Judas is gone, the “tension” that we began with is resolved. Jesus is left only with “his own” whom He will love “to the end” even by suffering the betrayal of that one who has just now left the room and gone out into the night. Here is the mystery of absolute sovereignty and infinite love. May we, then, walk as Jesus walked, who was tried and tested in every way even as we are, yet without sin in order that He might be our sympathetic great high priest.