

JUDAS AND PETER

by Ray C. Stedman

This morning we return to the *Upper Room Discourse*, found in the thirteenth through the seventeenth chapters of John. We have only recently started looking at these last words of Jesus before the cross. Here in this thirteenth chapter we have a fascinating account of the understanding of Jesus of all the events which led to his death.

Remember how John opens this chapter, saying that Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of the world and to go to the Father. And he knew that the Father had given all things into his hands. All power in heaven and earth was placed in his hands. Therefore he was, in a sense, directing his own death. He was in charge of the events. Rather than being a helpless victim of events over which he had no control, he was himself determining them as they went along.

You remember how, in the Garden, when the soldiers came to get him, Jesus so spoke to them that they all fell backward upon the ground. You wonder, in reading that, just who was in charge. He gave orders to the soldiers to dismiss the rest of the apostles and let them go, and the soldiers obeyed. He was in command throughout all this amazing series of events.

Then, Jesus knew of the strife and pride among his disciples as he entered the room. He knew that they were quarreling among themselves as to who would be the greatest in his kingdom. This drew forth his remarkable teaching evidenced in the footwashing. He taught them the lessons of humility and of the need for cleansing from the sin of pride and hostility toward one another.

In the closing part of this chapter, beginning with Verse 21, we have three movements.

- First, you can see how Jesus knew and understood the hostility of Judas, which would lead to his betrayal of Jesus, and to the death of both Judas and Jesus -- one by suicide, one by crucifixion.
- Then, he knew the weakness of Peter. That comes in at the end of the chapter. He understood what Peter had within him, and that this would lead to his three-fold denial and his cursing.
- In between, you have a great but brief section in which it is evident that our Lord knew the principle of glory, the means by which glory is achieved -- the principle which Judas rejected. And he also understood the power of love, a principle of which Peter was ignorant. This would be the radical secret that he would loose upon the world.

So there is the outline of the section we will go through this morning.

Let's take first the incident of Judas and Jesus together, beginning with Verse 21:

When Jesus had thus spoken, he was troubled in spirit, and testified, "Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me." The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he spoke. One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was lying close to the breast of Jesus; so Simon Peter beckoned to him and said, "Tell us who it is of whom he speaks." So lying thus, close to the breast of Jesus, he said to him, "Lord, who is it?" Jesus answered, "It is he to whom I shall give this morsel when I have dipped it." So when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. {John 13:21-26 RSV}

John sets this account against the background of the distress of Jesus. He said that when Jesus had spoken after the footwashing, and had recognized what Judas was, he was "troubled in spirit." The Greek word

means that he was "deeply agitated," he was grieved, hurt. Going to the cross was not an easy thing for Jesus to do. If we think of him as being unmoved through this whole circumstance, of speaking with poise and an untroubled spirit, we are wrong, because Jesus was deeply disturbed at this point. It grieved him that he would face this perfidy and treachery in Judas. He had just quoted from the 41st Psalm the verse in which David had said, "He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me," {Psa 41:9b RSV}. In the mind of Jesus this was what Judas was about to do. The phrase, "he has lifted his heel against me" is a word-picture of a companion who, without warning, for no reason, suddenly turns around, lifts his heel, and kicks you in the face. You can imagine how stunning that would be. Thus Jesus is greatly troubled as he anticipates this action of Judas, and he feels it with full force as an act of callous betrayal by one whom he had loved and trusted.

Now, Jesus knew that it was coming. This is made clear in many accounts. As far back as the sixth chapter of John we are told that Jesus said, "Have I not chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?" {cf, John 6:70}. He had known all along that one of his own disciples would betray him, because the Scriptures had said so. And he knew which one it was, yet nevertheless at this point, when Judas is actually on the verge of doing this, it hits with tremendous impact upon Jesus' heart, and he is grieved and hurt and distressed and troubled.

For he knew that the story of Judas was one of increasing greed. He had traced it. If you put together the many little references to Judas in the Scriptures you can see what was happening to this man. It begins to take shape. When he first joined the twelve he evidently was a sincere, dedicated follower. He had a good business head and a reputation for honesty. Therefore he was chosen to be the treasurer of the twelve. He was given charge of the money box. This indicated that the other disciples had confidence in him, and that he had a reputation for honesty. You never elect a treasurer who doesn't show some indication of being able to handle money properly. (I have always been surprised and disturbed that I have never been elected treasurer of anything!) But Judas was elected treasurer of the apostolic band.

When he had joined, he evidently had seen in Jesus the chance to fulfill his dream. Judas believed that Jesus was the fulfillment of the prophecies concerning the coming Messiah who would deliver Israel from its bondage and make it the head of the nations of the earth. He believed that world government would flow from Jerusalem. There were all the great passages of the Old Testament which spoke of this. And Judas, like other Jews, had read all the wonderful passages of glory, but had ignored those which dealt with the suffering Messiah. So he joined the band with the anticipation that he would be in the inner circle. And as you put the story together you can see that he began to think of himself in these terms.

But when Jesus began to speak about the cross, and when Judas saw him offending the leaders of the Jews, and he saw the growing opposition of the Pharisees toward Jesus, Judas knew that his dream was fading, and he became inwardly resentful and bitter against Jesus. Finally he took matters into his own hands. John tells us in the previous chapter, in Verse 6, that Judas had begun to steal money out of the money box. In the story of Mary, who wiped Jesus' feet with the ointment, John says, beginning with Verse 4,

But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was to betray him), said, "Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" This he said, not that he cared for the poor but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box he used to take what was put into it. {John 12:4-6 RSV}

So for some time Judas had been stealing out of the treasury. What for? Well, as you put the story together, it is evident that he had contracted to buy a piece of property, evidently a parcel nearby Jerusalem, in a fine location, which he thought would be a good spot to build on when the kingdom came. He had purchased it for himself. He was, in other words, feathering his own nest, utilizing the opportunity of being treasurer of the band to take the money for this purpose. As the hatred of Jesus by the Jews grew, and Judas saw that the time was approaching when an inevitable climax must ensue, he grew impatient. Lacking thirty pieces of silver to complete his purchase, he went to the high priest and made a deal with him to betray Jesus for the money needed to purchase the property. Later, when the money was brought back by Judas and flung at their feet, the priests took it and went out and finished the payment, bought the property, and called it the Field of Blood, because it was there that Judas had hanged himself.

Jesus knew that it was covetousness, avarice, greed, hunger for worldly enjoyment that was motivating Judas.

And yet Jesus was grieved and hurt, because he knew that the callous selfishness of Judas had come about only by his repeated rejection of Jesus' love. You can't read the story of these two men without seeing how consistently Jesus tried to reach Judas. Even here at the last supper it is apparent.

One sign of it is the table arrangements which John records here. Most of us are familiar with Leonardo da Vinci's painting, *The Last Supper*, and we think that is the way it was -- all of them sitting on one side of a long table. It is almost certain that this is not what they did, because the custom of the Jews was not to sit at table. They didn't use chairs as we do. The Jews, like the Romans, ate while half-reclining on couches which were around the table. The table was very likely U-shaped. Down at the center of the narrow end sat Jesus, as the host, half-reclining on his left side on his couch, so that his right hand would be free to eat with. On the adjoining couch to the right was John the Apostle. He always refers to himself as "that disciple whom Jesus loved." As he tells us here, he was sitting close to the breast of Jesus. His head would have been right at Jesus' chest-level because of the arrangement of the couches. And on the other side, the left side of Jesus, which, incidentally, was the place of honor, was Judas. And Jesus' head would have been at Judas' breast, as John's head was at Jesus'. This arrangement made it possible for these to carry on an intimate conversation, unheard by the others. Only that table arrangement explains what happened here at the last supper.

This gesture of giving the place of honor to Judas was Jesus' last attempt to try to reach this man's heart. Another mark of honor which Jesus bestowed was the giving of this little morsel. It was a custom of the Jews to do this, to break off a piece of bread or a bit of meat, dip it in juice, and hand it to a favored guest -- much as we propose a toast in someone's honor at a banquet today. Jesus took the bread and dipped it in the gravy and gave it to Judas in the presence of all the disciples. Only John heard Jesus say that this would mark the betrayer. So, when Jesus gave this morsel to Judas he was honoring him in the presence of the other disciples.

And yet never once in all the time that Judas had been with Jesus is there any record that he ever relented and allowed Jesus to love him. He never opened up, never admitted what he was thinking. He never responded to Jesus' love in the least degree, but increasingly he kept up a false front, a phony facade. Now at last, despite all the efforts of Jesus to reach him, he has "lifted up his heel" against him and kicked him right in the face. So we come to the last note of this tragic sequence, showing the increasing grip of evil on Judas, beginning with Verse 27:

Then after the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, "What you are going to do, do quickly." Now no one at the table knew why he had said this to him. Some thought that, because Judas had the money box, Jesus was telling him, "Buy what we need for the feast"; or, that he should give something to the poor. So, after receiving the morsel, he immediately went out; and it was night. {John 13:27-30 RSV}

You remember that the chapter began with satanic influence upon Judas. In Verse 2 John says, "And during supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him," {John 13:2 RSV}. There you see that Judas' greed had given the devil an opportunity. When we resist God's love and follow a determined march toward evil, it gives the devil opportunity. And he had the opportunity to implant thoughts in Judas' heart which would take deep root immediately. So he had already put it into Judas' heart to betray Jesus; the deal had been arranged.

But Judas still had a chance to retreat. Jesus would never have tried to reach him had he not still had an opportunity to recover at this point. When Jesus gave him the morsel, and Judas took it and ate it without a word or a sign of repentance or remorse, he passed the point of no return.

Pilots tell us that as they fly over the ocean they reach a point where it is just as far to return as it is to the other side. This is the point of no return.

This is one of the most tragic scenes in all of history -- to see a man, while he is still alive, deliberately reject truth to the extent that he goes beyond any hope of recovery. At this point Satan entered into him, and now you have satanic possession. Judas is no longer in control of his own will. He can no longer make any decision to resist evil. He is in the grip of death.

This is what we might call Judas' Gethsemane. Right after this event Jesus leaves the Upper Room and goes with his disciples into the Garden. There he withdraws a bit, and prays alone. This is his last chance to turn back before the cross. You remember that he prays, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me," but he adds, as always, "nevertheless, not my will but thine be done," {cf, Luke 22:42}. And though he sweated great drops of blood in the agony of that moment, we read that, at the end of it, angels came and strengthened him. His resolve was unbroken. Similarly, here is Judas at the point of no return. It is his last chance to turn back, but he doesn't take it. And when he makes that decision, Satan comes and strengthens him, so that he cannot turn back.

So Jesus commands him, now that there is no further hope of recovery, "What you are going to do, do quickly!" And the final word of John is, "he immediately went out; and it was night." John very likely is thinking in the same terms as the words he later would write in his first epistle: "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light..." -- if we walk out where our lives are open, where we don't try to hide anything, where our sin and our failure and our weakness is all there before God, but we don't try to justify it or to hide it, but we expose it -- "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, ... the blood of Jesus, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin," {cf, 1 Jn 1:7}. But if we turn from the light, turn our backs on Jesus and walk away, determined to do our own will, we walk into darkness, into night. And it is Jude, one of the brothers of Jesus, who later records that there are those who are like "wandering stars, for whom the nether gloom of darkness has been reserved forever," {Jude 1:13 RSV}.

So Judas leaves, and Jesus now turns to his disciples. And he shares with them great truth that he was unable to share while the traitor was present:

When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of man is glorified, and in him God is glorified; if God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once. Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going you cannot come.' A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." {John 13:31-35 RSV}

Here in this brief passage is the key to the rest of the chapters of this discourse. Chapters 14 through 17 all flow out of these words here. Jesus states an old principle, and gives a new commandment. The old principle is in these words: "Now is the Son of man glorified, and in him God is glorified; if God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once." Notice the stress on glory. This is the secret of glory, the principle by which we achieve glory. Glory is the recognition of who you really are. This is something we all long for. We are all striving for glory. We want to be recognized; we want people to know us. We long to be seen, to become the center of attention. We all want people to think highly of us. This is what Jesus is talking about. The secret of attaining this, he says, is to give yourself up, to lose yourself. He is looking ahead to the cross. The cross became a certainty the minute Judas left the room, and Jesus says, "Now [in view of this cross] is the Son of man glorified..."

Notice three manifestations of glory stated in this sentence:

First, Jesus is glorified in the cross. The cross is now so certain that in the rest of this passage he speaks of it as though it is already accomplished. And in the cross the inner character of Jesus becomes visible. Remember that in the opening of this Gospel, John says, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father," {John 1:14 RSV}. All that grace and truth becomes visible in the cross. As you look at the cross, and at all the circumstances of the events surrounding it, you see the reality of Jesus' humanity. There is the agony in the Garden of Gethsemane -- that strange, mysterious agony of spirit when Jesus was so troubled, so distressed, so upset and grieved, that he sweat great drops of blood and cried out in terrible, anguished cries to his Father. There you see the humanity of Jesus. And his cries from the cross -- of thirst, of pain, of being forsaken -- all of these tell us that he was one with us. Someone has written these very appropriate words:

It is well that we should think, sometimes, of the Upper Room, and of the Last Supper, and of his soul

"exceeding sorrowful unto death;" of Gethsemane, the deep shadow of the olive trees, his loneliness, prayers, and disappointment with his disciples, his bloody sweat; the traitor's kiss, the binding, the blow in the face, the spitting, the buffeting, the mocking, the scourging, the crown of thorns, the smiting; the sorrowful way, and the burdensome cross, the exhaustion and collapse; the stripping, the impaling, the jeers of his foes, the flight of his friends; the hours on the cross, the darkness, his being forsaken of God; his thirst, and the end.

In that cross you can see how close to us Jesus came, how one with us he was. But also you see the serenity of his faith. How fearless he was before Pilate! He said to him, "You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above," {John 19:11 RSV}. How fearless he was before Herod -- he stood silent, and would not answer him -- and before Caiaphas, the high priest! How he directed these events, as we have seen! He was master of the circumstances. There on the cross you see the compassion of his love. He forgave the revolutionary beside him, and prayed for his enemies. And previously, in Pilate's hall, he had looked at Peter with compassion when Peter had denied him. And you see the love and concern of his heart as he cared for his mother -- the last thing he did before he died -- committing her into the hands of John.

And there is that strange, unfathomable mystery of his work -- how he could be at once the sacrifice being offered, and the priest offering the blood before the Father? How he could be both the victim of man's sin, of man's hatred and cruelty and guilt and, at the same time, be the victor over all the forces of darkness and hell and death, over the principalities and powers whom he took and nailed to the cross? We never can fully understand it, but there is the glory of Jesus -- all hidden there in the cross of Christ.

And God was glorified in him. That is the second thing, he said. The cross not only reveals Jesus but it reveals the Father -- all the truth about the Father. The strange idea has arisen among Christians, I have found, that Jesus is the innocent sufferer, placating the wrath of a terribly angry God who is ready to smite humanity. But that is not the biblical view. The Bible says, "God was in Christ reconciling the world himself," {2 Cor 5:19 RSV}. You see in the cross the holiness and the justice of God. Isaiah says, "It pleased Jehovah to bruise him; he has put him to grief. He has made his soul an offering for sin," {cf, Isa 53:10}. There you see the power and the sovereignty of God. Peter, on the day of Pentecost, could say, "Jesus was delivered up [to be crucified] according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God," {cf, Acts 2:23}. He was in charge of the events. There you see the mercy and the love and grace of the Father. As Paul writes to the Romans, "He who spared not his own Son but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him freely give us all things?" {cf, Rom 8:32}.

And so, as Jesus says, he is glorified, the Father is glorified, and God will glorify him again, and will do it immediately. Here he is thinking of his resurrection and exaltation. Resurrection is never far behind death. Our Lord is declaring a great principle here. How do you achieve glory? How do you achieve the fulfillment you are wanting -- and quite properly so: God made us this way; it is not wrong to want to be noticed, to want to attain success, to want to achieve stature and status -- it is not wrong, but how do you go about it? The answer is: By dying. "If you save your life, you will lose it; if you lose your life for my sake," Jesus said, "you will save it," {cf, Matt 16:25}. And very close behind death is resurrection -- the exaltation of God. Peter puts it precisely in one of his epistles: "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that in due time he may exalt you," {cf, 1 Pet 5:6}.

That is difficult for the natural man, isn't it? We struggle with this -- I do, you do. We fight for the top place. We are filled with suspicion and guile toward one another. We could all be involved in a Watergate scandal. We all want to read each other's mail, to find out what is going on in other people's lives -- especially if they are in any sense our rivals. So how can you do this, how can you lose your life? What is the power which can make you be willing to throw it all away, apparently, to give it all up?

Well, that is why Jesus adds, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you..." That is the power which makes sacrifice possible. It can't be done on any other terms. It is not ambition -- that's not enough. It is love. The key is in the phrase, "as I have loved you." That is why Paul could write, "The love of Christ constrains us," {cf, 2 Cor 5:14}. That is the secret. That phrase is both the measure and the origin of our love. Our love for one another, Jesus says, is to be like his love for us. That is, we must love as he does, without condition, ready to forgive, honest and candid, open and accepting toward each other. That is the measure of it.

Then, it must originate from his love for us. As the Father loved the Son, and as he lived by that love, so we are to live by the love of Jesus available to us. We are to draw upon his loving acceptance of us in order to reach out in loving acceptance to someone else near us, whether they are lovely or not. That is the secret. Jesus himself says that this is the mark of true discipleship. "Do you want people to believe your message? They will when they see the mark. And this is the mark by which the world will know that you really are my disciples -- because you begin to reach out in love like this to each other. If you can't reach out like that in love, if you can't put another's need ahead of your own, and give up your own interests to minister to that need, then you are not my disciples," Jesus says, "you have no part with me." This is the mark.

Tom Skinner puts this into very contemporary but beautiful terms. He says,

It has always been the will of God to saturate the common clay of a man's humanity, and then to send that man in open display into a hostile world as a living testimony that it is possible for the invisible God to make himself visible in a man.

"By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another." {John 13:35}

Now we will take just a quick look at the closing scene with Peter and Jesus:

Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, where are you going? " Jesus answered, "Where I am going you cannot follow me now; but you shall follow afterward." Peter said to him, "Lord, why cannot I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the cock will not crow, till you have denied me three times." {John 13:36-38 RSV}

Judas betrayed Jesus; Peter denied his Lord. What is the difference between these two men? What is the difference between betrayal and denial?

Jesus himself has already explained this for us in Verse 10 of this chapter. Remember that he said that Peter had already been bathed and needed only to wash his feet. Judas had never been bathed, had never opened up once for the cleansing of love, had never opened his life to Jesus. Peter had dirty feet but a clean heart; Judas had an evil heart of unbelief, though perhaps an outward walk of apparent morality. And that is the sort of man who will betray Jesus.

What Peter lacked was the understanding of love. Peter thought that he loved Jesus, and he did -- with all the human emotion of which he was capable. But he had not yet learned to walk by the love of Christ for him. He had not yet learned to find his identity, not in his efforts to try to be something in himself, but in the acceptance of Jesus for him. That is the secret. Jesus knew that. Peter, with the utmost dedication of his flesh, with complete consecration and sincerity of heart, could say to Jesus, "Lord, I know where you're going -- you're going into death. And I'll lay down my life with you." And Jesus understood that. He said, "Peter, thank you. But before the cock crows, before the morning breaks, you will have denied me three times."

Yet you remember that story at the close of John's Gospel, in which, after the resurrection, Jesus gathered with his disciples on the shore of Galilee. He had built a fire for them, and had laid some fish on to cook, and they had breakfast together. While they were eating, Jesus said to Peter, "Peter, do you love me?" And Peter said, "Lord, you know I love you." Again he said, "Peter, do you love me?" "Lord, you know I love you." And once again, "Peter, do you love me?" And Peter said, "Lord, you know everything. You know that now that I love you." And it was then that Jesus said, "Peter, feed my sheep," {cf, John 21:15-17}. He commissioned him when Peter learned what love really is. When he learned how to draw upon the available love of Jesus for him to strengthen him in order to reach out in love for others, then Jesus sent him out with a worldwide commission to feed the sheep of God.

This is where John leaves us in this account -- helping us to see how thoroughly Jesus knows us, how thoroughly he understands us and sees all that is going on in our lives, and is ready to impart to us the great secret by which we can fulfill that impossible demand -- to give up in order to gain, to lose in order to win, to

go down to defeat in order to arise as a victor. It is as we learn to love by the love of Jesus, and to draw upon him, that "... by this all men will know that you are my disciples."

Prayer

Lord, teach us to love in this way. We know that the principle of life out of death can never be fulfilled in us until we have learned the new commandment -- to love one another as you have loved us. Teach us that, Lord. We stand, like Peter, uncertain, afraid, knowing how weak we are, knowing that our human love can never stand the pressure and the test, but knowing, Lord, that you are able to say to us, as you said to Peter, "You cannot follow me now; but afterward you will." In Jesus' name, Amen.

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