

Reading: John 13:18-30

Theme: Main Themes.

We read a sad and solemn passage, with many things to develop, but I will pick up its main themes using 4 headings:

1. Security and Strengthening. (v18-20)

Jesus had spoken of there being someone unclean among the disciples in the room and spoken of the blessing attached to doing loving and caring acts of genuine humble service, yet the blessings were not automatic, but reserved for His own people who genuinely served Him by serving others. Jesus knew who would betray Him and He hinted at this in v18a. Not everyone there would know these blessings, for one of them was not chosen...

Here we are dealing with the security of true believers - for Jesus uses the word “chosen” to mark out those who are His own, given to Him in eternity by God the Father, those for whom He laid down His life to redeem and are, those who by God’s grace and work of the Holy Spirit would be converted, born-again and put their trust in Him. Here it is not “keep safe”, but kept securely safe by God. These ones would be kept, guarded and one day brought safely to heaven. Jesus knows those who are among the chosen and knew Judas was not among them.

Judas had done many things, was a disciple, a follower of Jesus, had seen and heard much, even done miracles, signs and wonders; cast out demons and yet was not converted, never a child of God. As such he had false confidence, no hope and no saving faith. This morning, someone watching or listening may be a devout churchgoer, a religious person, may have done things for churches, for charities and the like; but if you have never trusted the Lord Jesus as your **own** Saviour, then you are not His. Maybe you made a decision years ago in a campaign or a meeting, but if

you're not living for Christ, then it will do you good to question if you are really saved. You could be as Judas - seen, heard, felt much but no true faith and hell bound.

You may have trusted Jesus, but still struggle, feel weak, useless, helpless, may often feel you let the Lord Jesus down. I encourage you to take heart. He knows you if you are His and **He will never let you go**. For you there is restoration, forgiveness to be found, joy and peace to be re-discovered, usefulness in His service and you can be restored again. Having truly trusted Him as your Saviour, you are safe in Christ no matter how low you feel.

We see that Jesus strengthened the disciples by forewarning them of His betrayal, to help them to have a greater trust and confidence in Him (v19). He had told them a number of times about His betrayal, but now here declares it plainly. They would be stunned and amazed, yet it was said to strengthen them, so when it happened, as they reflected on events, they were able to say "*Jesus knew who, when, why and how!*" and so strengthen their trust in Him!

Jesus also strengthens them by telling of the royal dignity upon them in their future work and ministry (v20). This was also to encourage them, so they knew that as they spoke of Him and His betrayal and were accepted, they would be aware He was accepted too and whoever received them in His name, so the Father would also be accepted. This is so good to know, as this places a great honour on every Christian as we witness, preach and gossip the gospel to others. If people reject us as messengers, witnesses of Christ; they reject Him also. We are not, by our personalities or actions, offend unwisely and unnecessarily, but if our message is rejected, so is our Saviour and God.

Jesus wisely and gently strengthened the disciples as He warned them of His betrayal. He knew their hearts would be rocked, shocked, dismayed by such treachery. They could have felt Jesus was the helpless victim of Judas' plotting, but Jesus' words here would convince them He wasn't duped and fooled, but was in control and working even this for good.

Things can come into our lives, the life of the church, or country or world - as we see now, that could dismay and shake our lives and faith. We can be so easily cast down. One scandal or problem in a church can dismay and put off so many, while the faithful walk of so many in the Lord, over a lot of years in difficult circumstances, are seldom used as encouragement by the same ones! Jesus would have us apply both and realise there will be some who will sin and betray Jesus by their words and actions, but we are to also realise there are those who will, in very difficult circumstances, stand rock-solid and faithful for their Lord and Saviour. We need to keep both in view and be prepared for the disappointments, the scandals and not naively imagine all will be fine and well because we are in an evangelical church. Now see:

2. Sorrow and a Solemn Declaration. (v21)

Jesus was troubled in spirit was sorrowful as He makes a solemn declaration. "*I tell you the truth...*" or "*Verily, verily...*" As the writer of this gospel, John is quite amazing for he shows and dwells most on the divinity, the divine nature of the Lord Jesus and yet at the same time he shows us most of the human nature and affections of the Lord Jesus too. As we've looked at this passage, we have seen Jesus knew many things, but here we see He is deeply troubled in spirit as He spoke about these matters. Jesus shows sorrow and grief in this solemn declaration - one of them in the room would betray Him.

In v18 Jesus quoted Psalm 41:9 which was written by David as he was betrayed by a close friend as his son rebelled against him (2 Samuel 15:12). This friend turned, betrayed and hurt David - we'd say "*he put the boot in*". It really hurt David that a close friend could do that. Here is one greater than David and one doing worse than David's friend Ahithophel - it really hurt!

Sorrow affects the Lord Jesus as He speaks of one of His own close followers betraying Him. I wonder how the Lord Jesus sees us this morning? Would He have sorrow over us and make a solemn declaration over any one of us? Are we hiding sin - secret little sins or even gross sins and covering it up, but feeling all is fine because no one knows? The Lord Jesus knows and will expose it one day. If we cover, conceal sins we will not prosper, but if we confess and renounce such, we will find mercy (Proverbs 28:13). This means we are to consider our ways before His all-seeing and knowing gaze. Would we want to be the cause of hurt, grief and sorrow to such a Saviour and have Him make such a solemn declaration on our life? Moving on we see:

3. Silence and Suspicion. (v22)

The betrayer knew he was known, as were his plans. No doubt he and the others were shocked by this declaration of Jesus. If there had been a silence in the room before due to the foot washing, then an even greater silence would be there now - Judas out of shock and horror that his plans were known; the others in unbelief and horror, even not accepting this could be true! Yet they looked around at each other, wondering who it was.

The silence coupled with suspicion gives rise to 3 types of questions. **The first type** is to do with self-suspicion - Matthew 26:22 "*Surely, not I Lord?*" These men question their lives,

motives, their own selves and feared in case they could do this evil - suspicious of their themselves before others!

The 2nd type of question was that of loathsome hypocrisy as Judas asked “*Surely not I, Rabbi?*” (Matthew 26:25) - incredibly Judas hypocritically asked the same question, yet knowing that it was him! He did so to save face, to keep up the pretence by asking along with the other disciples. We too can keep up a pretence that all is fine with us, make the right noises and go through all the motions - yet we know there is sin, there is wrong in our lives. Pray that we will stop being like this and stop trying to impress others.

The Lord Jesus could so easily have exposed Judas, but did not. Jesus even gave him a further opportunity to repent, yet Judas did not. The time would come when all would know Judas’ sin as his sin would be brought into the light of God. We, at times need to wisely hold back on occasions not to expose a person, it could be God may grant them repentance, or is waiting for this sin to ripen fully to judgement. On other occasions known, especially gross sin, must be exposed to a person and, if necessary, to the church by the church officers. We need wisdom and grace to know when and how these are to be rightly applied. Yet here the Lord Jesus, in not naming Judas, does the disciples a favour as it drives them to self-examination, which is sadly only a passing phase - as they go from self-suspicion to boasting “*we will never leave you... I’ll die with you...*”

The 3rd type of question is that of childlike confidence, which is how John asks the Lord Jesus and we will deal this within our final point:

4. Signal and Slipping Out. (v23-30)

Peter was probably bursting to know, but did not blurt it out, as he had learned a little bit of tact - for the time being! So, he signals to John who was reclining next to Jesus. This scene seems strange to us in our Western world, but it is nothing wrong in their culture even if it is strange to our modern and Western minds. Many parts of the world the acceptable culture is for men who are friends to walk along hand-in-hand, whereas if a man and woman did so, it would be quite offensive and taken as a sign of immorality or licentiousness. Siân and I were aware of this when we had the opportunity to teach in northern Kenya and seldom held hands when we were walking about.

The disciples and Jesus were reclining around a U-shaped table, reclining on little couches on mattresses (*their feet away from the table*), all probably laying on left sides and next Jesus is John. So, Peter signals to John to ask and so John simply leans back a bit, there is Jesus, and as John turns his head, he is on the Saviour's chest and quietly asked the question, with a childlike confidence "*Lord who is it?*" I say John here, as I am assuming, with most commentators and people, that he is the one meant. He was the one closest to Jesus in His affections, closest to His heart emotionally and here physically, although John does not name himself.

What a privilege, to be able to lean back and put your head on Jesus' chest - maybe to hear His heart beating, or feel His breath on you as He speaks. For us all I want to urge us all to get and to keep close to the Lord Jesus, to know Him more personally and intimately as we walk close with Him. It would be such a privilege. Yet we would not boast or pride ourselves in such, but marvel at such love to us - as we will feel our unworthiness; yet that will be the Lord's working in us in our closeness with Him.

Jesus told John the signal He would give to identify the one (v26), then He dipped the piece of bread and gave it to Judas. Realise this dipping and giving this bread was a confusing signal! Usually this was a token by the host for marking a guest out as special, as beloved, as being cared for. Surely, Jesus wouldn't give it to the one who would betray Him! This dipping and giving the bread seems to be one last gesture of love and loving concern to Judas, a last offer of friendship and reconciliation to the one who would betray Jesus.

How many times would Jesus have dealt with us, spoken to our heart and soul to trust Him, to become a Christian? Even to us who are Christians, so we would turn from our coldness, sin and backsliding? Maybe He's doing so again today through my questions. Can I urge us all not to dismiss it and be just like Judas and ignore the overture and gesture of His love towards us!

Judas took the bread and as soon as he did, we are told Satan entered into him. This does not mean Judas was possessed by the devil, but that Satan seals that hardening of heart and life which had been going on. Judas had been slipping away for some time as he opened the door to greed and covetousness. The devil slipped in and led him step by step to betray the Saviour. Here in v27 it probably indicates God's grace was removed and Satan was in control, for Judas had so hardened his heart to Jesus and God, that the devil had dominion, rule over Judas and his life.

Perhaps you think that you would never harden your heart towards God and Jesus, but God's grace and the gospel offer will either soften your heart or harden it – just as the sun on a hot day will soften wax or harden clay. What is God's grace and the gospel doing to your life every time you hear of it?

Judas quickly goes to do what he has to do, as now he felt that his plan was exposed and known. I wonder if John or Peter realised what Jesus had said and if the 2 of them were in stunned unbelief and couldn't say or do anything to stop Judas leaving! Most, if not all of the disciples thought Judas, as the treasurer, was going out to buy some extra things for the feast. Judas went out, slips away from the Passover meal. Passover always coincided with the full moon, the Pascal moon. John's account says that Judas went out and "*it was night*" - not a mention of the full moon.

John's gospel carries within it keywords and ideas – one being Jesus is the light, the idea of dark or night shows no light and that nothing of Jesus was there. Judas going out into the night darkness, is a picture of his going to the place of eternal darkness i.e. hell and a picture of the darkness of his heart. The night was dark, Judas's heart was dark too, but hell is darker than both!

This is amazing when we consider the many, many privileges Judas had - the things he had done, had heard and seen. Even that Jesus would give an overture of love and kindness to him in dipping the bread and giving it **to him**. Yet Judas would go out and go onto destruction from so many wasted opportunities to gain eternal life. What about someone listening now? Don't be content with your life as an unbeliever. Fear for your soul. You can go from this or any service, any religious situation, background or upbringing and be heading onward to eternal darkness. I urge you to be warned and learn from Judas.

Peter also did wrong later that evening, but he did not go to hell! Both these 2 privileged disciples sinned seriously, one went out to meet the night, the other, broken-hearted, went on to meet the dawn with repentance. Which will we follow?