

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth One Verse at a Time*

Unmasking the Betrayer

Scripture: John 13:17-30

Code: P26

Unmasking the Betrayer **John MacArthur**
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Judas Iscariot, who betrayed the Son of God with a kiss, has become the most despised person in the annals of human history. His personality is the darkest in the chronicles of the world, and the name Judas itself bears a stigma, reflecting the scorn for him that burns within us. The New Testament writers disdain Judas to such a degree that in every list of the disciples given in the Gospels, Judas is listed last, with a note of contempt after his name.

Hatred for Judas was so deep in the years following the closing of the New Testament that several incredible legends about him evolved. They describe bizarre occurrences, characterizing Judas as ugly, evil, and totally repugnant. One, in the apocryphal Coptic Narrative, said that Judas, having betrayed Christ, was infested with maggots. Consequently, his body became so bloated that on one occasion he was trying to ride on a cart through a gate, and being too large to fit through it, he hit the gate, his body exploded, and maggots spewed all over the wall. Obviously, that story is not true, but it shows the high level of contempt for Judas in the early centuries.

When I was in seminary, I wrote my dissertation on Judas Iscariot. During the year that I spent working on it, and since then, I have found it extremely difficult to write or speak on. Sin is never more grotesque than it is in the life of Judas. When we study Judas and his motivations, we are prying very close to the activity of Satan. But there are valuable reasons for examining Judas and his sin. For one thing, to understand Jesus' love in its fullness, it helps to look at the life of Judas, because despite the awfulness of Judas' sin, Jesus reached out to him in love.

Jesus and Judas

In John 13:17-30, Jesus and Judas come head to head. We see clearly at this point the evil of Judas contrasted with the absolute purity of Jesus Christ. The diabolical deed that had been festering in the heart of Judas--the treachery he had already begun to perpetrate--was pushed to its climax, and Judas was unmasked as the betrayer.

Jesus speaks at the beginning of this powerful passage:

"If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. I do not speak of all of you. I know the ones I have chosen; but it is that the Scripture may be fulfilled, 'He who eats my bread has lifted up his heel against Me.' 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."

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 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?"

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.

After the morsel, Satan then entered into him. Therefore Jesus said to him, "What you do, do quickly."

Now no one of those reclining at the table knew for what purpose He had said this to him. 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.

There we see Jesus and Judas--the epitome of opposites: the Perfect One and the absolutely wretched; the best and the worst. The purity of Jesus and the vileness of Judas, by contrast, became very obvious.

Judas was an ultimate tragedy--probably the greatest tragedy that ever lived. He is the perfect and prime example of what it means to have opportunity and then lose it. He becomes all the more terrible because of the glorious beginnings he had. Judas followed the same Christ as the others. For three years, day in and day out, he occupied himself with Jesus Christ. He saw the same miracles; heard the same words; performed some of the same ministries; was esteemed in the same way the other disciples were--yet he did not become what the others became. In fact, he became the very opposite. While they were growing into true apostles and saints of God, he was progressively forming into a vile, calculating tool of Satan.

For three years, he moved and walked with Jesus. Initially, he must have shared the same hope of the Kingdom that the other disciples had. He likely believed that Jesus was the Messiah. He too, had left all and followed Jesus. Certainly he became greedy, but it is doubtful that he joined the apostles for what money he could get, because they never really had anything. Perhaps his motive at the outset was just to get in on this Kingdom that Jesus would bring.

Whatever his character at the beginning, he gradually became the treacherous man that betrayed Christ, a man who had no thought for anyone but himself, a man who finally wanted only to get as much money as he could and get out.

Greed, ambition, and worldliness had crept into his heart, and avarice had become his besetting sin. Perhaps he was disappointed because of unfulfilled expectations of an earthly Kingdom. Maybe he was tormented by the unbearable rebuke of the presence of Christ. Surely it created a great tension in his heart to be constantly in the presence of sinless purity, and yet be so infested with vileness. Perhaps, too, he began to sense that the eye of the Master could see who he was and what he was. Or it may be that all those things had begun to eat at him.

Whatever the reasons, he ended in absolute disaster, the greatest example of lost opportunity the world has ever seen. On the night he betrayed Jesus, he was so prepared to do Satan's bidding that Satan was able to enter him and take complete control of him. A few days before this in Bethany, he had met with the leaders of Israel and bargained for thirty pieces of silver, the price of a slave--about twenty to twenty-five dollars. Now his evil deed comes to full fruition on the eve of the crucifixion.

Jesus and his disciples (including Judas) were in the upper room. The vile traitor was sitting there, having already made his bargain to betray Jesus for money. He had already initiated the plan, and now he had returned to spend these moments with the disciples, looking for the right moment to betray Jesus' presence to the Jewish leaders.

Jesus had revealed in verse 10 that He knew Judas's heart, saying, "'You are clean, but not all of you.' For He knew the one who was betraying Him" (vv. 10-11). Judas had been sitting there all through Jesus' wonderful lesson on humility and washing of the disciples' feet. Jesus had even washed his feet. He sat there, the wretched hypocrite, letting the blessed Lord wash his feet, while in his head he was plotting the betrayal of Jesus, hardly able to wait until he could get his hands on the thirty coins.

Even though Jesus knew what Judas was about to do, He washed his feet. It was only one example of the marvelous love of Jesus Christ and the way He reached out to Judas. The measures He took to win Judas even at this late hour made His love all the more wonderful. One would think the experience of having Jesus wash his feet would be enough to break any man's heart. But not Judas's, so cold was he. He was determined to sell the Master to the executioners.

The Blessed and the Cursed

Having taught by example a wonderful lesson on humility, Jesus then carefully explained its meaning. He concluded His discourse by saying, "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them." Blessed, of course, is a synonym for happy. One who learns how to show humble love, who is willing to bow down to the ground and serve another believer, is rewarded with true happiness. When you condescend in that kind of love, when you're willing to do that menial duty for the sake of another, when you don't care about exalting yourself to the predominance of every situation--when you humble yourself--you will be happy.

But Jesus could not speak of blessedness without speaking of the contrast, and what it is to be cursed. He did not think of happiness without thinking of tragedy and unhappiness. While the breath of happiness was coming from His lips, at the same time His mind began to fill with thoughts of the cursed Judas sitting beside Him. And so, He turns in verse 18 from the happy disciples to the cursed one, Judas. From verses 18 to 30 the dialogue centers on Judas himself. This is the final confrontation between Jesus and Judas, leaving only a kiss later on. It is important to understand why Jesus brought up the subject of His betrayal at this point. Unless He had in some way prepared the disciples for what was about to happen, it could have had a serious, adverse affect on them. If Judas had suddenly and without warning betrayed Jesus, the disciples may have concluded that Jesus wasn't all He claimed to be; otherwise He would have known that Judas was like this, and He never would have chosen him. So Jesus said, "I know the ones I have chosen; but it is that the Scripture may be fulfilled, 'He who eats My bread has lifted up his heel against Me.' 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" (v. 18).

It would be very easy to pass by this and miss the point. Jesus wanted to be sure that they did not think He was surprised by what Judas was about to do. In effect, He therefore said to those disciples, "I know I chose Judas. I did it, not by accident, not in ignorance, but in order that Scripture might be fulfilled." He chose Judas because Judas was necessary to bring about His death, which was necessary to bring about the redemption of the world.

Prophecy was clear that Christ would be betrayed by a close friend. Why did Jesus choose Judas, then? He chose him to fulfill prophecy--not only the prophecy specifically about Judas, but also the prophecies of His own death. Somebody had to bring it to pass, and Judas was more than willing. God used the wrath of Judas to praise Him, and through the deed that Judas did, He brought salvation. Judas meant it for evil, but God used it for good (cf. Genesis 50:20).

God's Plan and Judas' Plot

You see, Judas fit right into the divine master plan. Judas' betrayal was predicted in detail in the Old Testament. Psalm 41:9 says, "Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me."

Psalm 41 had historical, as well as prophetic, meaning. It was David's lament over his own betrayal by his trusted adviser and friend Ahithophel. David had a wayward son named Absalom. Absalom decided to start a rebellion, overthrow his father, and take over the throne. Ahithophel turned against David and joined Absalom's rebellion. The picture of David and Ahithophel in Psalm 41 is fulfilled in a greater sense in Jesus and Judas. The phrase "lifted up his heel" portrays brutal violence, the lifting of a heel and driving the heel into the neck of the victim. That is the picture of Judas. Having wounded his enemy, who is lying on the ground, he takes the giant heel and crushes his neck.

Psalm 55 contains another clear prophecy of Judas and his betrayal. Imagine Jesus speaking these words:

For it is not an enemy who reproaches me, then I could bear it; nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me. Then I could hide myself from him. But it is you, a man my equal, my companion and my familiar friend. We who had sweet fellowship together, walked in the house of God in the throng.

He has put forth his hands against those who were at peace with him; he has violated his covenant. His speech was smoother than butter, but his heart was war; his words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords. (vv. 12-14; 20-21)

Zechariah contains a prophecy about the betrayal of Christ by Judas in even more detail. It gives the exact price he was paid for his treachery, just as it is recorded in the New Testament. Zechariah 11:12-13 prophetically gives the words of Judas, talking to the Jewish leaders:

I said to them, "If it is good in your sight, give me my wages; but if not, never mind!" So they weighed out thirty shekels of silver as my wages. Then the Lord said to me, "Throw it to the potter, that magnificent price at which I was valued by them." So I took the thirty shekels of silver and threw them to the potter in the house of the Lord.

That describes to the letter what Judas did after the death of Jesus Christ. He took the thirty pieces right back to the house of the Lord and threw them down. Matthew 27 says that the thirty pieces were picked up and used to buy a potter's field, exactly fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah 11.

Jesus' choosing Judas was no accident. Long before Judas was ever born, his hatred of Jesus Christ was planned by divine design--predestined in the plan of God from eternity past. In John 17:12, Jesus, praying to the Father, says of the disciples, "While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name which You have given Me; and I guarded them, and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, that the Scripture would be fulfilled."

Divine Sovereignty and Human Choice

Understand, Judas's part was not apart from his own will. Even though God ordained that Judas would be the one of the Twelve who would betray Christ, it was not apart from the desire of Judas. Judas was no robot. Our Lord did not simply allocate to an unwilling Judas the part of the villain in the crucifixion. Such a thing would be inconsistent with the character of Jesus Christ. It is also inconsistent with the historical record. Throughout the ministry of Jesus, He endeavored to drive Judas to repentance, time and time again, with His love, His pleas, and His rebukes. So although Judas's treachery fit into the plan of God, God did not design him as a treacherous man. He became a traitor to Christ by his own choice. God merely designed his treachery into the divine plan. He took Judas, wretched as he was, and fitted him into His plan. If God was responsible for making Judas what he was, Jesus would have pitied him rather than rebuked Him.

Judas Iscariot, then, was the chosen instrument of God, not apart from his own will, to betray Christ and bring about His death. This wretched man--evil as he was, by his own desire--was designed into God's plan. And to show that it was not God's will apart from Judas's will, all the way along and at every opportunity, Jesus gave him warnings and pleas to bring him to repentance and salvation. And at every point he turned it down. We see that clearly in John 13.

Walking with Jesus and Following Satan

Judas, through his life of treachery, supplies sinners with a solemn warning. We learn from the example of Judas that a person can be very near to Jesus Christ, and yet be lost and damned forever. Nobody was ever closer to Christ than the Twelve. Judas was one of them, and he's in hell today, because while he may have given intellectual assent to the truth, he never embraced Christ with heartfelt faith.

Judas wasn't deceived; he was a phony. He understood the truth, and he posed as a believer. Furthermore, he was good at it--the cleverest hypocrite we read about in all the Scriptures, for no one

ever suspected him. He had everyone fooled except Jesus, who knew his heart.

And mark it, wherever God's work is done, there are impostors like Judas. There will always be hypocrites among the brethren. The favorite trick of Satan and those he employs is to "disguise themselves as servants of righteousness" (2 Corinthians 11:15). The devil is a master at making his work look good--and he is busily at work among the Lord's people.

Truth and Consequences

Prior to this time Jesus had maintained secrecy about Judas's hypocrisy. Now He determined to reveal the truth, knowing that if the other eleven disciples were taken by surprise, their faith might have been undermined. He wanted them to know that He was not being taken by surprise, that God is never any man's victim. He wanted to ensure that when He was gone, their faith would be strong.

In revealing to them the truth about Judas, He also irrefutably affirmed His deity. In verse 19, He says, "I am telling you before it comes to pass, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am." (The 'He' in that verse is not in the original Greek text.)

"I am" is God's name (cf. Exodus 3:14). Jesus is in essence saying, "I want you to know that I am God, and I knew this would happen." Thus He affirmed His name and established His omniscience. Nothing is hidden from His sight. He knows what goes on in Christians' hearts, but more than that, He knows what goes on in the hearts of unregenerate people as well. In John 5:42, Jesus, talking to unbelieving Jews, says, "but I know you, that you do not have the love of God in yourselves." He knows the heart of every man, believer, or unbeliever. He reads it like an open book.

The Apostles and the Betrayer

In John 13:20, after affirming His deity, Jesus, still speaking of His imminent betrayal, says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me." Initially, that statement doesn't seem to fit the context of what Jesus is saying. But a closer look reveals that it fits beautifully.

We don't know what went on in the gap between verses 19 and 20. But you can imagine that when the disciples found out about the betrayal, they might have all assumed that because of the failure of one of them, credibility would be destroyed for the rest. They might have assumed that a traitor among the disciples would lower the standing of them all. If Jesus went to the cross, they must have thought, the Messianic hope would be gone. Their ministry would be over. They might as well forget

about the Kingdom. And, remember, Jesus had just been stressing the importance of humility. Perhaps they were beginning to think that He was telling them to forget about their high calling.

So what Jesus was saying is this: "No matter what happens, it doesn't lower your commission, and it doesn't alter your calling. You are still my representatives. Although there's a traitor among you, that doesn't affect your high calling. The treachery of Judas must never lower your estimate of apostolic responsibility." It's a tremendous lesson. He's saying, "When you go out there and preach, if they receive you they are receiving Me. And if they receive Me, they're receiving the Father who sent Me. Your commission is that high. You represent God in the world."

When Christ was crucified, Judas turned out to be a rotten hypocrite, and the whole world seemed to be collapsing, it was easy to hit bottom spiritually and emotionally. So Jesus took the opportunity to elevate them and encourage them to keep their eyes on their calling and on their ministry, where they belonged.

We need to be aware of that truth as well. No matter what Satanic opposition we run into, no matter how frustrating the work becomes, nothing can lower our commission. I recently talked to a discouraged man who is in the Lord's service. He was facing so much opposition that he was beginning to wonder if he was in the right place.

Opposition is to be expected, I told him. Anything we do for God is going to meet with opposition. If every missionary looked at a mission field and said, "Oh, they might not believe me over there;" we'd never get anything done. Just because it's going to be difficult, and just because there's going to be opposition doesn't lower your calling. We are Christ's ambassadors in the world. Those who reject us reject Christ, so regardless of what happens, we stand with Him. That's as high as you can get.

When a believer moves out into this world, he represents Jesus Christ. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:20, "Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." In Galatians 4:14, the apostle Paul says, "You received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus Himself." And that's the way everybody ought to receive a believer. When a man rejects our witness for Christ, he rejects Jesus and he rejects God. That's how strategically important believers are. And that is Jesus' point in John 13:20. Notice that He uses the word "whomever." That refers to ambassadors of Jesus Christ in every age, including those of us who represent Him today.

Have you ever heard someone use hypocrites as an excuse for not following Christ? People often say, "There are too many hypocrites in the church for me." Or, "Well, we don't go to church, because we went when I was nine and we saw a hypocrite. Haven't been back in forty-two years!" That will be a pathetic excuse when they rattle it off to God in the day of judgment.

But it is true that there are too many hypocrites in the church. They're everywhere. And one hypocrite is one too many. But the fact that some are hypocrites does not diminish the glory of God or lower the high calling of every true child of God. One betrayer among the apostles did not tarnish the commission of the rest.

Wheat and Tares

In Matthew 13:24-30, Jesus gave this parable:

The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares also among the wheat, and went away. But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also.

The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, "Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?"

And he said to them, "An enemy has done this!" The slaves said to him, "Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?" But he said, "No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may root up the wheat with them. Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, 'First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

In other words, it was hard to tell the difference between wheat and tares before they were ready for harvest. And while there may be some telltale signs, we can't always tell the difference between the true people of God and the hypocrites. If we knew which was which, we could go to every hypocrite individually and warn him of the danger of his hypocrisy. But we can't read people's hearts. But someday Jesus is going to reveal who is true and who is false, and He will divide accordingly.

The Troubled Heart and the Hardened Heart

Unmasking Judas betrayal must have caused deep anguish within the heart of Jesus. "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'" (v. 21). What troubled Him? Possibly a number of things: He was troubled because of the unrequited love of Judas; He was troubled because of the ingratitude in Judas's heart; He was troubled because He had a deep hatred of sin, and sitting at the same table with Him was sin incarnate; He was troubled because of the hypocrisy of the one about to betray Him; He was troubled

because He knew Judas faced an eternal destiny in hell; He was troubled because He could see with His omnipotent eye Satan moving around Judas; He was troubled because He sensed all that sin and death meant. But perhaps most of all He was troubled because He had an awareness that Judas was a classic illustration of the wretchedness of sin, which He would have to bear in His own body on the next day.

In His anguish, He says, "One of you will betray Me." Imagine the shock that must have rattled through the disciples. Their hearts must have raced. One of those at the table; one whose feet Jesus had just washed; one of their own, close group was about to betray the Master. One of them was plotting to use his intimacy with Christ to guide the enemy to Him so that they might kill Him. It must have been difficult for them to fathom that one of their own group could have such hardened treachery in his heart.

In fact, the disciples couldn't imagine whom He could be talking about. John says they "began looking at one another, at a loss to know of which one He was speaking" (v. 22). Matthew says they all said, "Is it I? Is it I?" And Judas, the hypocrite, even said, "Surely it is not I, Rabbi?" (Matthew 26:25).

Love and Treachery

It is noteworthy that the disciples were so perplexed. It shows that Jesus had shown love to Judas for three years, even though He knew Judas would betray Him in the end. If Jesus had ever treated Judas any differently from the way He treated the other disciples--if He had been more distant, or shown resentment--they would have known immediately that Judas was the betrayer. If Jesus had harbored any bitterness for what He knew Judas would ultimately do, it would have come out in the way He talked to him. But, evidently, for three years He had been gentle, loving, and kind to Judas, treating Him in exactly the same manner He treated the other eleven. They thought of him as one of the group, and no one suspected him.

In fact, they must have had a great deal of trust in him. Judas was treasurer of the group. And hard-hearted Judas had just played his game, all the way along. He had the behavior of a saint but the heart of a sinner. He must have come to hate Christ deeply.

The hatred of Judas and the love of John make an interesting contrast. Try to picture the scene around the table. The table itself would have been U-shaped. In accordance with the customs of that time, the disciples were not seated on chairs, but rather reclining on couches. The table would have been a low, solid block with the couches around it, and the host would sit at the center. On each side of him would be guests of honor, and others would be positioned all around the table. They would lie on their left sides, resting on their left elbows, using their right hands to eat. Thus the one who was on

the right of Jesus would have his head very close to the heart of Christ. From a distance, it would appear that he was reclining on the breast of Christ. John, who wrote this account, often referred to himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (21:20; cf. 21:24). It was not that Jesus loved him more than He loved the others, but rather that John was completely overwhelmed with the concept that Jesus loved him at all. Also, John was consumed with love for the Lord. He loved Jesus as much as Judas hated Him.

John was reclining next to Jesus: "There was reclining on Jesus' breast one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved. Simon Peter therefore gestured to him, and said to him, 'Tell us who it is of whom He is speaking'" (John 13:23-24). Peter silently motioned to John to ask Jesus who the betrayer would be. So John leaned up and whispered, "Lord, who is it?" When he turned to speak with Him, Christ would be very close.

"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" (v. 26). Jesus' answer to Peter and John was really a final appeal of love to Judas. "The morsel" was a piece broken from some of the unleavened cakes that would be on the table as a part of the Passover feast. Also on the table would be a dish called *cheshireth*, filled with bitter herbs; vinegar; salt; and mashed fruit, consisting of dates, figs, raisins, and water--all mixed together into a pasty substance. They would eat it with the unleavened bread like a dip.

It was very special for the host to dip a morsel into the *cheshireth* and give it to the guest of honor. And Jesus, kindly, in a gesture of love toward Judas, dipped the morsel and gave it to Judas, as if Judas were the guest of honor. One would think that all Jesus had done for Judas that night would have broken his heart, but it didn't. Judas was an apostate. His heart was hardened, and nothing Jesus could do for him would break it. Salvation for him was now impossible. He had become the classic example of the kind of person spoken of in Hebrews 6, who has "once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away" (Hebrews 6:4-6). He had seen and experienced and tasted all those things, but he had never embraced them with true faith.

The writer to the Hebrews says of those like Judas, "It is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God, and put Him to open shame" (v. 6).

Judas was so confirmed in his apostasy that he literally became possessed by Satan. Verse 27 says, "And after the morsel, Satan then entered into him. Jesus therefore said to him, 'What you do, do quickly.'" Judas had been duped by Satan; he'd been flirting with Satan. The enemy had already put it in his heart to betray Christ, and now, the devil simply moved in and took over. In that awful moment,

the evil will of Judas overcame the last and most powerful offer of Jesus Christ's love, and the sin against the Holy Spirit was finalized. In that moment, Judas was damned to hell forever. He had spurned the love of Christ for the last time and his eternity was sealed.

Day and Night

Jesus' attitude toward Judas immediately changed. He was through with Judas. Judas had crossed the line of grace, and no more could Jesus reach out to him. The difference was immediate, radical--like day and night. Jesus had been reaching out to Judas in love, but Judas was confirmed in his stubborn apostasy. All Jesus wanted now was to get rid of him.

Notice that Satan and Jesus were now giving Judas the same direction. Satan said, "Betray Him." Christ said, "Do it quickly." Judas was clearly determined to betray Christ, Satan was determined to try to destroy Him, and Christ was determined to die for the sins of the world. But Jesus would shatter Satan's plan by rising from the grave.

None of the disciples caught the significance of what was occurring. "Now no one of those reclining at the table knew for what purpose He had said this to him. 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" (vv. 28-29). They thought he was going shopping, or out to dispense some charity at the Passover season.

"And so after receiving the morsel he went out immediately; and it was night" (v. 30). There he went, a solitary figure, leaving the room, to enter into the eternity of hell. The Bible doesn't say where he went, but evidently he went to finalize his deal with the Sanhedrin. And when he went out, it was night. For Judas, who had walked with Jesus and yet stayed in darkness, the hours of daylight and opportunity were over. It was more than mere physical night, it was eternal night in the soul of Judas. It is always night when a man goes out of the presence of Jesus Christ.

There are Judases in every age. Perhaps they are more common than ever today. The professing church is full of people who are selling out Jesus Christ, "crucify[ing] to themselves the Son of God and put[ting] Him to open shame" (Hebrews 6:6). There are many who have eaten at His table, and then lifted their heel against Him. And the greatest tragedy still is only their own ultimate disaster. A poem I once read includes these few poignant words:

Still as of old,
By himself is priced.
For thirty pieces Judas sold

Himself, not Christ.

Be sure that you make the most of your opportunities. Be sure you're not a hypocrite. If we learn anything from the life of Judas it is that the greatest spiritual privileges might be neutralized by illicit passion. A life that is lived in the face of the unclouded sun may yet end in a night of despair.

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