



Catalog No. 1380

John 13:18-38

Forty-second Message

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August 12th, 2007

BETRAYAL, DENIAL, AND LOVE

The four gospel writers recount the miracle-laden story of how God sent his son to cure the deadly virus that had infected humanity when mankind decided it didn't need God and could run the show itself. If that story were to be published today, you might read it in a magazine at Starbucks, or hear the authors being interviewed by Oprah or Letterman. Sadly, it has fallen into such disuse that it is collecting dust on bookshelves. But it is an amazing story, one that takes center stage in the Bible. In the words of Vincent Van Gogh, "[the] Gospel is the top of the mountain of which the Old Testament and the letters of the Apostles are the slopes."¹

The fourth gospel, to which we return today, was written by John the apostle. John: the beloved disciple, the pastor and evangelist, the Patmos exile. John wrote his gospel primarily to evangelize Jews and Jewish proselytes, His sought to help the people who possessed the longest history with God to believe in Jesus. Amazingly, however, God has used this gospel to lead many people who had no knowledge of Jewish history to believe in Jesus. And God has used this gospel to help his people grow in faith and wisdom, even though that was not its primary purpose.

As we continue our study in chapter 13 of this book, Jesus and the disciples are gathered in the upper room. Only a few short hours remain before his arrest and crucifixion. Two discourses and a prayer by Jesus provide the platform for him to say good-bye to his men and to leave them with some very important words on how they are to live after he has departed.

Even though John's purpose is to lead people to faith, he includes this material so that people can understand what it means to be a believer. The main characters in the story are Judas, Peter, and Jesus. Its main themes are betrayal, denial, and love.

"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." (John 13:18-21 NASB)

Earlier, Jesus had washed the feet of the disciples, but here he says that one of them will betray him. At other points in his gospel, John had alluded to this betrayal:

"But there are some of you who do not believe.' For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him" (6:64).

"Jesus answered them, 'Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?' Now He meant Judas the son of Si-

mon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray Him" (6:70-71).

"But Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples, who was intending to betray Him, said, 'Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and given to poor people?'" (12:4-5)

"During supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Him," (13:2).

John had also just made it clear that not all of them were "clean":

"Jesus said to him, 'He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you 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'" (13:10-11).

John is a great storyteller. All along, the reader anticipates that something terrible is going to happen to Jesus, and it will be an inside job, a betrayal by a friend. Like a scene from "The Godfather," the one who sets up the meeting is the betrayer. In verse 18, Jesus quotes from Psalm 41:9:

**Even my close friend in whom I trusted,
Who ate my bread,
Has lifted up his heel against me.**

David was alluding to the betrayal by Ahithophel, which is described 2 Samuel 16. Here David's greater son, Jesus, encounters the same fate. He will be betrayed, handed over, delivered up by a friend.

Jesus tells his disciples that they will have knowledge before the event. This is a change from the first half of the book, where Jesus' signs were followed by explanations. His goal is to strengthen their faith for the critical hour ahead. They will know and believe that Jesus is "I am" (Ex 3:14, Is 41:4; 43:10), a familiar phrase in John which identifies Jesus as God.

Jesus makes a connection to both his Father and the disciples. For Judas, this means that failure to believe in Jesus means failure to know God. What it means for the disciples is that it prepares them to represent Jesus to the world.

As Jesus speaks of his betrayal, he feels deep pain. John does not record Jesus' anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane, but he does describe it here. Jesus was "troubled" in spirit. This is the same word used of his emotion following Lazarus's death (11:33), and of the recognition that his hour had arrived (12:27). The word signifies revulsion, horror, anxiety and agitation. Even though Jesus knew everything that was going to happen, he was human. He experienced all the emotion that any human would feel.

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. (13:22-26)

The disciples are at a loss. Imagine the embarrassed silence as their minds churn and their eyes scan the room: “Who is it?” Judas, knowing he is about to be exposed, faces the choice either to execute his plot or seek forgiveness. Peter, true to his character, breaks the silence, motioning John to gather intelligence. This is the first of five times that John uses the phrase “beloved disciple” (19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20). This is his way of remaining anonymous – a wonderful model for all Christians.

John was reclining on the bosom of Jesus. This is the same phrase that describes the Word of God, who explains God, in the bosom of the Father (1:18). We assume that John is on the right side of Jesus, with his back to Jesus’ breast. John leans in and makes the inquiry. Jesus responds by saying it is the one to whom he gives bread. Judas must have been close by, perhaps to the left of Jesus, which would have been the place of honor.

The host at this kind of feast might take a piece of bread and dip it into a common bowl, drawing out a particularly tasty morsel to pass to a guest as a mark of honor or friendship. In this instance, perhaps it was a final gesture of supreme love. Betraying one whose table you had shared was a heinous offense, especially so in the context of near-eastern hospitality and courtesy. This makes the Lord’s Supper serious business in the community of God’s people. You can’t go home and betray brothers and sisters after you have eaten the covenant meal together.

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. (13:27-30)

Judas received the bread, but not the love. He makes his final decision, and at that point Satan enters into him and he becomes fully possessed. Some think that Judas was the innocent victim of Satan, that he was a tool of providence. But at some point Judas opened his heart to Satan and gave him entrance. Luke refers to Judas’s “wickedness” in Acts 1:18. Judas is fully responsible for his actions.

Jesus tells him to “quickly” do what he is going to do – maybe more quickly than he had intended. Jesus is in control; he will lay down his life willingly.

John probably heard what Jesus said but he remains silent. The rest of the disciples guess at what Judas is up to. Perhaps he is going to buy food for the feast after Passover, or give money to the poor, a custom on Passover night. Judas went out immediately into the night. Again we notice the metaphor of night and darkness. Judas leaves the light to enter into an awful darkness. But it is also night for Jesus, the hour of the power of darkness. “And that final act of love becomes, with a terrible immediacy, the decisive moment of judgment. At this moment we are witnessing the climax of that action of sifting, of separation, of judgment which has been the central theme in John’s account of the public ministry of Jesus. ... So the final gesture of affection precipitates the final surrender of Judas to the power

of darkness. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has neither understood it nor mastered it.”²

Why did Judas betray Jesus? Some say that he was a zealot who wanted to overthrow Roman rule by force but Jesus was not going along with his agenda. But the Bible points to moral failure, a motive of greed. We see this in chapter 12, when Judas reacts with a cold harshness to Mary’s act of extravagant and generous love in anointing Jesus with perfume.

Judas was chosen by Jesus to be one of the twelve. In Judas we see illustrated the tension between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. The selection of Judas was not a mistake or an oversight. The sovereign God used evil for his own purposes. Judas was not Plan B. And yet Jesus loved him right to the end, washing his feet and offering the bread of grace. But Judas chose to reject the love of God. He alone bears the responsibility. As D. A. Carson writes, “not even evil takes place outside of his (God’s) sovereignty, yet the evil is not chargeable to him: it is always chargeable to secondary agents, to secondary causes.”³

What was true of Judas is true in our own lives. God is sovereign. He uses everything we do, even our sin, for his glory. But this fact never condones sin and evil. God gives us the freedom to make our choices, but we alone are responsible. When we have our own agendas for power or greed, when we want to run our own lives, we essentially want to get rid of Jesus. We do not want him looking over our shoulder. Even though he offers us grace and love, he just does not fit into our plans.

And what was true with the disciples is true in the church. There is disobedience and sin within the ones whom God chooses and calls. “The devil does some of his best work behind stained glass.”⁴ Not all election is unto salvation. God chooses even those who will seek to thwart the advancement of the kingdom, but use it for his purposes.

This is very troubling to some. On occasion we hear someone say that he or she has given up on church because of some scandal or difficulty. But the story of Judas helps us have a realistic faith. “We are reminded of the presence of radical disobedience in the very heart of the Church. The Church, is and has been from the very beginning, the company chosen and called by the Lord, and yet at the same time a company in which sin is at work. ... Here is the strange paradox of the Church: it is at once holy and sinful. The Lord himself is present in its life, yet Satan is also present. This is a summons to both realism and faith. The disciple who has understood Jesus will not be shaken by sin and apostasy in the Church.”⁵

Following Judas’s departure, Jesus turns his attention to his disciples and begins the first of two farewell discourses.

Therefore when he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him; if God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and will glorify Him immediately. (13:31-32)

The verb “to glorify” is found more times in John’s gospel than any other book in the NT. It is a major theme in John, especially in chapters 12-17, it is used 19 of the 61 times it appears in the NT.

“Glorify” is the request of Jesus’ prayer in chapters 12 and 17:

“Father, glorify Your name.” Then a voice came out of heaven: “I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again” (12:28).

“Jesus spoke these things; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, ‘Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You,’” (17:1).

Certainly we find an allusion here to Isaiah 47 and Daniel 7:

**He said to Me, “You are My Servant, Israel,
In Whom I will show My glory” (Isa 49:3).**

**“And to Him was given dominion,
Glory and a kingdom,
That all the peoples, nations and men of every language
Might serve Him” (Dan 7:14).**

With the departure of Judas, the final scene is set in motion. Both Father and Son will be glorified. God’s glory is his presence among his people, supremely manifested in Jesus (1:14). The cross will now be the greatest moment of God’s displayed glory: the glorifying of the Father in the Son and of the Son in the Father. The wonderful truth is that when God calls us, he invites us to share in the glory of the Father and the Son.

“Little children, I am with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, now I also say to you, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’” (13:33).

The hour of Jesus’ glory is the hour of his departure. The disciples will not be able to follow. In his desire to prepare them, Jesus tenderly addresses them as his “little children.” The phrase “a little while” occurs repeatedly in the discourse, signifying a sense of urgency and immediacy. Jesus said the same thing to the Jews (7:24; 8:21), but his tone was much different. Neither the disciples nor the Jews understood.

“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.” (13:34-35)

Now that the wheels have been set in motion, Jesus can give the disciples his final instructions. The hour of glory has arrived. He will be leaving soon, so they should “love one another.”

The phrase “new commandment” is used only here in John, but it occurs three other times, in 1 and 2 John. The phrase “love one another” occurs 13 times in the NT, four times in the upper room discourse and another six times in 1 and 2 John.

Jesus makes loving one another a new commandment. However, it not really new, since it formed the bedrock of the OT. The whole law was summed up in Deut 6:5 and Lev 19:18. In his last series, Brian Morgan pored through the book of the covenant, setting out all the ways that love was designed to manifest itself in community. Every one of these detailed instructions in the law declares that life is precious and that we are to live and love according to the value that God puts on life. The concept is old, but now the command to love is new in standard, in motivation and in implementation.

Jesus gives the new standard: “as I have loved you.” He has just acted out its definition by humbly washing the disciples’ feet. In a few hours he would go to the cross. To truly love one another involves self-sacrifice.

Ray Stedman points out the nature of Jesus’ sacrificial love:

1. It was without respect to persons.

Jesus loved the unlovely and the rejected, the people who were difficult to love and those cast off by society. We too are called to love the least, the lost, and the left out.

2. It was expressed in deeds, not just words.

We love when we take action to visit the sick, feed the hungry and clothe the naked.

3. It continued to the end.

This is how the chapter began. Jesus loved his disciples, his own, unto the end. Jesus never gave up on them. Even when we see no hope, we continue to love and offer grace without gaining advantage.⁶

When we love sacrificially, we think we will become less, but the truth is that we become more. We begin to experience what it means to be truly human and to live in the image of God, as God designed for mankind and manifested in Jesus. “... to give yourself away in love to another would seem to mean that you end up with less of yourself left than you had to begin with. But the miracle is that just the reverse is true ... To give yourself away in love to somebody else – as a man and a woman give themselves away to each other at a wedding – is to become for the first time yourself fully. To live not just for yourself alone anymore but for another self to whom you swear to be true ... is a new way to come fully alive.”⁷

What will motivate us to love one another? Again, Jesus says, “I have loved you.” The motivation comes from Jesus and his love for us. The problem we have in loving like Jesus is that at times we have not felt God’s love for us deep in our heart. But when we truly know where we would be without the love of God, then it is this love that stimulates us to reach out to others, to take our mind off ourselves and to see others in need of the same love. Jesus awakens our desires to be like him.

How will we be able to love one another? Loving others is a great concept. It is easy to memorize, but impossible to put into practice. Again, Jesus says, “I have loved you so that you will love one another.” The love of Jesus not only stimulates us and awakens the desire in us, but the love we experience from him will allow us to become a conduit for his love to others. Jesus himself will empower us to do what we cannot naturally do.

Why are we to love one another? The love of Christ creates the new community, and it is this love in the community that identifies it as his. People will know we are followers of Jesus by our love. Love in the community of God’s people reflects the mutual love between the Father and the Son. It is the love within the church that proclaims the true God to a watching world. And it is love, the love of the Father, the love of the Son, and the love we have for one another, that is the most powerful force in the world to transform the human heart. “Of all powers, love is the most powerful. ... It is the most powerful because it alone can conquer that final and most impregnable stronghold which is the human heart.”⁸

Simon Peter said to Him, “Lord, where are You going?” Jesus answered, “Where I go, you cannot follow Me now; but you will follow later.” Peter said to Him, “Lord, why can I not follow You right 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, a rooster will not crow until you deny Me three times. (13:36-38)

Notice that Peter doesn’t even hear what Jesus has just said about the new commandment. He is stuck on where Jesus is going and why he can’t go with him. How typical of Peter! He expresses what all the disciples were wondering: “What about me?”

Jesus tells Peter that he cannot follow because only he can offer the acceptable sacrifice for sin, and it is not time for Peter to die.

Eventually he would follow Jesus to the cross. As tradition has it, he would be crucified upside down, but not for some 30 years.

Peter responds to Jesus with a passionate outburst of his confused devotion: "I will lay down my life for you." Peter is ignorant of his weakness and arrogance. Jesus repeats the question to him. Ironically, it is Jesus who will lay down his life for Peter. Jesus then tells Peter that he will deny him three times before the rooster crows. These words silence Peter and he does not speak again in the upper room.

What was true for Peter is true for many of us. Peter's emotion is like the emotion of the football team that gets all worked up in a passionate frenzy to win one for the Gipper, but subsequently goes out and gets slaughtered. Peter is an example of zealous Christians who want to win the world for Christ. They are exciting to be around, they appear to be on fire for the Lord, they have great gifts of organization and starting new exciting programs, but like Peter, they often operate out of their own strength, and eventually that strength will fail.

Betrayal, denial, and love. Jesus teaches and even commands us to love one another. In our text, the way of loving that Jesus is referring to is contrasted to the way of Judas and the way of Peter. Judas can't love because his heart has never been changed by Jesus' love for him. He does not receive the Son and so does not receive the Father. The only love that Judas has is love of self. Selfish love does things and says things for personal advantage. Selfish love results in being controlled by the devil. And when we are controlled by devil, we want to get rid of Jesus. We become a betrayer of the Jesus. We pretend to follow, but we follow the evil one.

Peter has the wrong kind of love, and many of us follow in his steps. We are zealous and energetic, always promoting the action, creating programs and events to love people. But this love is a human, natural kind of love, a love that lacks the Holy Spirit and the authentic love of Jesus. Typically, we love those we want to love in the ways we want to love. In reality, like Peter, we are uptight, harsh, and hard to be around. In our misguided passion we deny Jesus. Jesus knows this about Peter and he knows it about us. In fact, it is through these very failures that we come to know the love of God and how to love like Jesus. Judas and Peter both fail, but Peter believes, and Jesus will bring him to restoration and forgiveness.

But the first word, the most important word, given by Jesus on the eve of his departure, is to love one another.

No matter how right we are in what we believe about God, no matter how accurately we phrase our belief or how magnificently and persuasively we preach or write or declare it, if love does not shape the way we speak and act, we falsify the creed, we confess a lie. Believing without loving is what gives religion a bad name. Believing without loving destroys lives. Believing without loving turns the best of creeds into a weapon of oppression. A community that believes but does not love or marginalizes love, regardless of its belief system or doctrinal orthodoxy or 'vision statement,' soon, very soon, becomes a 'synagogue of Satan' (Rev 2.9)⁸

What we must understand is that it was love that motivated God to create us and save us, and that love, manifested through the Church, continues to create and save.

1 Henri Nouwen, *A Cry for Mercy* (New York: Doubleday, 1981), 73.

2 Lesslie Newbigin, *The Light Has Come* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 173.

3 D. A. Carson, *How Long, O Lord?* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 1990), 189.

4 Eugene Peterson, *The Jesus Way* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 230.

5 Lesslie Newbigin, *The Light Has Come*, 171-172.

6 Ray C. Stedman, *The One Commandment*. <http://www.raystedman.org/john/index.html>

7 Frederick Beuchner, *Listening to Your Life* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 161-162.

8 Beuchner, *Listening to Your Life*, 242.

9 Eugene Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 261.