

John 13:21-38
October 19, 2025

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: How can we as modern-day followers of Jesus betray Christ with our actions or lack of action? [Let people engage]

Transition: Betrayal is a bitter pill to swallow. We have all experienced it at some point in our lives, whether through broken promises or unfaithful friendships. At the same time, we have been guilty of betraying Jesus and perhaps others in our life. Jesus knows all about betrayal. Today's account highlights both Judas's betrayal of Jesus and Peter's future betrayal of Him! I think this text serves as a cautionary tale for all of us. It will serve us well to examine the difference between good intentions and true faithfulness AND to examine the areas of our life where we are most confident in our own strength or loyalty to God. Let's begin.

BOOK:

²¹ After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, "I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray me." ²² His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant. ²³ One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him. ²⁴ Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, "Ask him which one he means." ²⁵ Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, "Lord, who is it?" ²⁶ Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon. ²⁷ As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. "What you are about to do, do quickly," Jesus told him, ²⁸ but no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him. ²⁹ Since Judas had charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the Feast, or to give something to the poor. ³⁰ As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night.

Jesus Predicts Peter's Denial

³¹ When he was gone, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him. ³² If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once. ³³ "My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come. ³⁴ "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." ³⁶ Simon Peter asked him, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus replied, "Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later." ³⁷ Peter asked, "Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." ³⁸ Then Jesus answered, "Will you really lay down your life for me? I tell you the truth, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What stood out to you? What questions do you have? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about man? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit? [Let people engage]

Q: What is your takeaway? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

Love among Christians must be the vanguard of all that we are about. If we fail in this endeavor, then the world will be given the right to deny that we are disciples of Christ. Our love for one another will be the distinguishing mark of authenticity that we truly follow Christ.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 1, pp. 347-349). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

The Scripture Jesus quoted was Psalm 41:9—“Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me.” When David wrote the psalm, he was probably referring to his counselor Ahithophel, who turned traitor and joined Absalom’s rebellion (see 2 Sam. 15–17). It is significant that both Judas and Ahithophel committed suicide by hanging themselves (2 Sam. 17:23; Matt. 27:3–10; Acts 1:18). However, Judas did not commit suicide in order to fulfill biblical prophecy, for that would make God the author of his sin. Judas was responsible for his own decisions, and those decisions fulfilled God’s Word.

Jesus was concerned that Judas’ treachery would not weaken His disciples’ faith. This is why He related it to the Word of God: when the disciples saw all of this fulfilled, it would make their faith stronger (see John 8:28). Judas had been disloyal, but He expected them to be loyal to Him and His cause. After all, He was God the Son sent by God the Father. They were Christ’s chosen representatives; to receive them would be the same as receiving the Father and the Son. What a privilege, to be ambassadors of the King!

The remarkable thing is that the others at the table with Jesus did not know that Judas was an unbeliever and a traitor. Up to the very hour of his treachery, Judas was protected by the Savior whom he betrayed. Had Jesus openly revealed what He knew about Judas, it is likely that the

men would have turned on him. Remember what Peter did to Malchus when soldiers came to take Jesus!

From the very beginning, Jesus knew what Judas would do (John 6:64), but He did not compel him to do it. Judas was exposed to the same spiritual privileges as the other disciples, yet they did him no good. The same sun that melts the ice only hardens the clay. In spite of all that our Lord said about money, and all of His warning about covetousness, Judas continued to be a thief and steal from the treasury. In spite of all our Lord's warning about unbelief, Judas persisted in his rejection. *Jesus even washed Judas' feet!* Yet his hard heart did not yield.

Jesus had spoken before about a traitor (John 6:70), but the disciples did not take it to heart. Now when He spoke openly about it at the table, His disciples were perplexed.

Peter signaled to John, who was the closest to Jesus at the table, and asked him to find out who the traitor was. The Lord's reply to John was certainly not heard by all the men; in fact, they were carrying on discussions among themselves about who the traitor might be (Luke 22:23). When Jesus gave the bread to Judas, it was interpreted as an act of love and honor. In fact, Judas was seated at the place of honor, so our Lord's actions were seen in that light: He was bestowing a special honor on Judas. No wonder, after Judas left the room, the disciples got into an argument over who was the greatest (Luke 22:24–30).

John was no doubt stunned by this revelation, but before he could say or do anything, Jesus had sent Judas on his way. Even though Satan had entered Judas, it was Jesus who was in charge. He lived on the timetable given to Him by the Father, and He wanted to fulfill what was written in the Word. Since Judas was the treasurer, it was logical for the disciples to conclude that he had been sent on a special mission by the Lord. Judas had hypocritically expressed an interest in the poor (John 12:4–6), so perhaps he was on an errand of mercy to help the poor.

Keep in mind that Judas knew what he was doing and that he did it deliberately. He had already met with the Jewish religious leaders and agreed to lead them to Jesus in such a way that there would not be any public disturbance (Luke 21:37–22:6). He heard Jesus say, "Woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It had been good for that man if he had not been born!" (Matt. 26:24) Yet, he persisted in his unbelief and treachery.

John's little phrase "and it was night" carries a tremendous impact when you remember that *light* and *darkness* are important spiritual images in his Gospel. Jesus is the Light of the world (John 8:12), but Judas rejected Jesus and went out into darkness; and for Judas, *it is still night!* Those who do evil hate the light (John 3:18–21). Our Lord's warning in John 12:25–26 went unheeded by Judas—and it goes unheeded by lost sinners today, people who will go where Judas went unless they repent and trust the Savior.

The instant Judas was gone, the atmosphere was cleared, and Jesus began to instruct His disciples and prepare them for His crucifixion and His ultimate return to heaven. It was after Judas' departure that He instituted the Lord's Supper, something that Judas as an unbeliever certainly could not share. Judas was out in the night, controlled by the prince of darkness, Satan; but Jesus was in the light, sharing love and truth with His beloved disciples. What a contrast!

The theme now changes to the glory of God (John 13:31–35). From the human perspective, the death of Christ was a dastardly deed involving unspeakable suffering and humiliation; but from the divine perspective it was the revelation of the glory of God. “The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified” (John 12:23). Twelve times in this Gospel, the title “Son of man” appears, and this one in John 13:31 is the final instance. Daniel 7:13 identifies this title as messianic, and Jesus sometimes used it this way (Matt. 26:64).

What did it mean for Jesus to glorify the Father? He tells us in His prayer: “I have glorified Thee on the earth; I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do” (John 17:4). This is the way all of us glorify God, by faithfully doing what He calls us to do. In our Lord’s case, the Father’s will was that the Son die for lost sinners, be raised from the dead, and then ascend to heaven. The Son glorified the Father and the Father glorified the Son (John 17:1, 5).

There would come a time when the Son would be glorified in these disciples (John 17:10), but they could not follow Him at that time. Peter boasted that he would follow the Lord even to death (Luke 22:33), but unfortunately ended up denying Him three times.

Jesus had said to the Jews on two occasions that they would seek Him but not be able to find Him or follow Him (John 7:33–36; 8:21–24). Note that He did not tell His disciples that they would not be able to find Him, but He did say that to the unbelieving Jews. One day the believing disciples would go to be with Him (John 14:1–3), and they would also see Him after His resurrection. But during this time of His suffering and death, it was important that they not try to follow Him.

I have heard eloquent sermons about the sin of Peter who “followed afar off” (Luke 22:54), and the emphasis was that he should have followed nearer. The simple fact is that he should not have followed at all! The statement in John 13:33 is proof enough, and when you add Matthew 26:31 (quoted from Zech. 13:7) and our Lord’s words in John 18:8, the evidence is conclusive. Because Peter disregarded this warning, he got into trouble.

The disciples’ responsibility was to love one another just as Christ had loved them. They would certainly need this love in the hours to follow, when their Master would be taken from them and their brave spokesman, Peter, would fail Him and them. In fact, all of them would fail, and the only thing that would bring them together would be their love for Christ and for each other. The word *love* is used only twelve times in John 1–12, but in John 13–21 it is used forty-four times! It is a key word in Christ’s farewell sermon to His disciples, as well as a burden in His High Priestly Prayer (John 17:26). The word *new* does not mean “new in time,” because love has been important to God’s people even from Old Testament times (see Lev. 19:18). It means “new in experience, fresh.” It is the opposite of “worn out.” Love would take on a new meaning and power because of the death of Christ on the cross (John 15:13). With the coming of the Holy Spirit, love would have a new power in their lives.

This section begins and ends with love: Jesus’ love for His own (John 13:1) and the disciples’ love for one another. It is love that is the true evidence that we belong to Jesus Christ. The church leader Tertullian (a.d. 155–220) quoted the pagans as saying of the Christians, “See how they love one another?” And how do we evidence that love? By doing what Jesus did: laying

down our lives for the brethren (1 John 3:16). And the way to start is by getting down and washing one another's feet in sacrificial service.

Blum, E. A. (1985). *John*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 321-322) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

13:21. **Jesus was troubled in spirit.** The word “troubled” is *etarachthē* (“stirred or agitated”), the same word used of Jesus in 11:33; 12:27 (also used by Jesus in 14:1, 27). Being human, Jesus was troubled over Judas' soon betrayal of His love and friendship. Being divine, Jesus knew in advance that it would happen. Jesus sensed the spiritual hardness and deadness which sin had produced in Judas. The word **testified** and the formula **I tell you the truth** stress the solemn announcement of Jesus' words.

13:22. That anyone in this close fellowship could do this to Jesus was almost beyond comprehension. Judas had covered his tracks so well that none of the others suspected him.

13:23–24. **Simon Peter**, the leader and perhaps the most emotional disciple, wanted to deal with the traitor. Luke (22:38, 49–50) mentioned that the disciples had two swords! **The disciple whom Jesus loved** was evidently John, the author of this Gospel (cf. *Introduction*). John and Judas were **reclining next to** Jesus, but Peter's position at the table was not near enough to ask Jesus privately. So he **motioned to** John and asked him to **ask** Jesus whom He meant.

13:25–27. By **leaning** John could touch **Jesus**, so **he asked ... Lord, who is it?** Giving the morsel **to Judas** was an uncaught sign of recognition to John, but it was also the Lord's final extension of grace to **Judas**. A host's giving a morsel **of bread** to a guest was a sign of friendship. How ironic that Jesus' act of friendship to Judas signaled Judas' betrayal of friendship.

Satan entered into him (cf. v. 2) is one of the most terrible expressions in the Scriptures. Satan now used Judas as his tool to accomplish his will. **Do quickly** is literally “do it more quickly,” which may imply Jesus' words spurred Judas to act in God's proper timing.

13:28–30. Since **no one** grasped the significance of Jesus' words, even the beloved disciple must have missed the intent of the sop until later. As **Judas ... went out**, no one thought anything but good of him. They assumed that he, as the group's treasurer (cf. 12:6), was going **to buy** food **for the Passover feast or to give something to the poor**. He had deceived his peers but not Jesus. **And it was night** in any other Gospel might simply be a time notice, but in John's Gospel it probably also has symbolic significance. Judas was leaving the Light (8:12; 12:35, 46) and going out into the darkness of sin (3:19).

B. Jesus' coming departure (13:31–38).

13:31–32. After the departure of Judas, the events leading to Jesus' death fell into place quickly. **Jesus** was then free from the tension which Satan in Judas had produced. Also the long tension building up toward His death (Luke 12:50) would soon be over. The words **glorified** and **glorify**

occur five times in these two verses. Jesus' unique glory was revealed in His death. The Father was also glorified in Jesus' death because God's love, His condescension, and His righteousness were made known (cf. John 1:14; Rom. 3:21–26). The words **God ... will glorify Him at once** looked ahead to the Resurrection and the Ascension.

13:33. **My children** translates *teknia*, (“little children”; the diminutive of *tekna*, “children”). This term of love expressed Jesus' concern for them. It is used only here by Jesus in this Gospel. John used it seven times in his first epistle (1 John 2:1, 12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21), and Paul used it once (Gal. 4:19). Jesus announced once again that He would be gone and they would not be able to find Him (cf. Matt. 23:29; John 7:34; 8:21; 12:8, 35). This was true in both His death and His Ascension.

13:34–35. The 11 disciples would survive in His absence by obeying His example of **love**. The command is **new** in that it is a special **love** for other believers based on the sacrificial love of Jesus: **As I have loved you, so you must love one another**. Christians' love and support for one another enable them to survive in a hostile world. As Jesus was the embodiment of God's love, so now each disciple should embody Christ's love. This love is a sign to the world as well as to every believer (1 John 3:14).

13:36–38. **Peter**, quick to speak, picked up on what Jesus had said about going away (v. 33). He wanted to know **where** Jesus was **going** (cf. Thomas' similar request; 14:5). Peter's love was such that he wanted to be with Jesus. But **Jesus replied** that it was not possible right then for Peter to be with Him. **Peter** could not conceive of any situation that would make Jesus' words necessary. He was certain that his love and courage were up to any challenge, including death. **I will lay down my life for You**, he affirmed. But Peter did not know himself as well as he thought, nor did he know the satanic power at work against him (cf. Luke 22:31–32). Jesus' prediction of Peter's defection (**you will disown Me three times**) must have completely shocked the other disciples. They may have wondered if Peter was the traitor (cf. John 13:21–25).

White, J. E. (1998). *John*. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), *Holman Concise Bible Commentary* (pp. 482-483). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Mark of Discipleship (13:31–38)

After Judas's departure, Jesus made clear that His time with the disciples was short (13:33). The heart of this passage is found in verses 34–35: “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” “Here Jesus was saying that love among Christians must be in the vanguard of all that we are about. Further, if we fail in this endeavor, then the world will be given the right to deny that we are disciples of Christ. Our love for one another will be the distinguishing mark of authenticity that we truly follow Christ.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). John 13:21-38. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.