

The Prediction of the Betrayal of Jesus
Matthew 26:20-25
Gerry Andersen
Valley Bible Church Adult Sunday School

Matthew 26:20-25 begins the final Passover of Jesus' life (26:20-29). It follows after the disciples ask Him about their preparation to eat the Passover meal. This narrative account can also be found in the other three Gospels (Mark 14:17-21; Luke 22:21-23; John 13:21-30). Luke's account is the most succinct of the Gospel accounts, while John gives the most information. This is fitting, as John's Gospel devotes five whole chapters to the events in the upper room.

One notable difference between the Gospels is that Matthew and Mark place the announcement of Jesus' betrayal (Matthew 26:20-25; Mark 14:18-21) before the institution of the Lord's Supper (Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25), while Luke places the announcement of the betrayal (Luke 22:21-23) after the Lord's Supper (Luke 22:17-20). Most view Matthew and Mark as giving the chronological account and that Luke combines them into a single description because it would appear less likely that Judas would be present for the Lord's Supper.

The disciples' dinner (26:20)

None of the Gospels describe the twelve disciples traveling to Jerusalem for the Passover meal. The next scene is with Jesus and His twelve disciples gathered for the supper in the upper room. This took place "*when evening came,*" which would have been Thursday evening.

The Passover meal could not have been eaten until Thursday evening, since the Passover day would not begin until after sunset in Judea. Also, this would need to be eaten indoors, as Exodus 12:46 states, "*It is to be eaten in a single house.*" This is why the upper room needed to be secured. During the time of Jesus, the Passover meal was eaten within the city of Jerusalem.

Although the original Passover was eaten while standing (Exodus 12:11), "*Jesus was reclining at the table*" as this was the rabbinical practice and instruction in the first century. The custom was that only slaves or servants would stand while eating. Therefore, "*the twelve disciples*" reclined at the table with Jesus. Earlier, Matthew described Jesus as reclining at the table when they ate a meal with Matthew's fellow tax-collectors in Matthew 9:11. They would have reclined around a low table on cushions in a U-shaped pattern.

Jesus would have taken the role of leadership of this meal, for this was the role that the head of the household would have held. Eating this meal together was what a family would do, which served as a testimony to the relationship that Jesus had with His disciples, *“And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, ‘Behold My mother and My brothers!’* (Matthew 12:49).

The disciple declared (26:21)

At some unspecified point while they were eating the Passover meal, Jesus alerted His disciples that, *“Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me.”* The disciples learn what Matthew’s readers already knew, that *“one of the twelve, named Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, ‘What are you willing to give me to betray Him to you?’”* (Matthew 26:14-15). Matthew also informed His readers when He listed the twelve disciples in Matthew 10:2-4 that Judas Iscariot would be *“the one who betrayed Him”* (Matthew 10:4).

Jesus had told them earlier that He would be delivered to the chief priests when they were in Jerusalem, *“He took the twelve disciples aside by themselves, and on the way He said to them, ‘Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death’”* (Matthew 20:17-18). However, now Jesus reveals the manner in which He will be delivered over to death, specifically through the betrayal at the hands of one of His twelve chosen disciples.

The word translated *“betray”* included the concept of delivering one over to punishment, and thus necessarily involved a betrayal of Jesus to those who could bring about His death, namely the chief priests. When Jesus spoke this to them, *“He became troubled in spirit”* (John 13:21). Yet, never would they have considered it possible that one of them could ever participate in the death of their Savior.

Yet the disciples should not have been surprised by the betrayal of one who was close to Jesus in light of the prophecy of Psalm 41:9, *“Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.”* While John’s Gospel does not mention the Lord’s Supper of Jesus, it is the most detailed concerning the betrayal of Jesus by Judas. John is the only Gospel that includes the fulfillment of Psalm 41:9 in his description of the betrayal, *“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’”* (John 13:18). By teaching the eleven of this prophecy and the betrayal, Jesus prepared the disciples for what would lie ahead for them.

The disciples' denial (26:22)

The knowledge of this coming betrayal of Jesus by one of the twelve disciples was a shocking revelation. While they knew that Jesus had many enemies among the various sects of Judaism, they did not think it could be one of them, and therefore, this produced deep grief among those who would continue to follow Jesus. This grief shows that they believed the words that Jesus spoke to them. They did not question whether it would really happen, but only that each of them was not involved with the betrayal.

While the eleven would have been deeply grieved at the prospect of one of their own betraying Jesus, Judas would have been deeply grieved for a completely different reason. He obviously had already initiated the betrayal of Jesus in 26:14-16, but he would be deeply grieved that Jesus was aware of what he had done and that the other disciples were told about his betrayal. His grief was as selfish as his betrayal.

While Judas knew about the betrayal, the others were completely oblivious. *"The disciples began looking at one another, at a loss to know of which one He was speaking"* (John 13:22). They knew that they weren't involved but clueless about Judas. This was the case even after being with Judas and seeing him around Jesus for the past three years.

The exclamation *"Surely not I?"* was spoken by each of them individually to Jesus, *"They began to be grieved and to say to Him one by one, 'Surely not I?'"* (Mark 14:19). What they spoke was a rhetorical question that assumed a negative response and the Greek particle is used in such a way in other places in the New Testament (Luke 6:39; John 18:35; Acts 10:47; 2 Corinthians 1:17; James 1:11). Of course, this was genuinely only the question from the eleven, for Judas would have spoken this only because the others said it (cf. 26:25).

It ought not be surprising that the eleven were so unsuspecting of Judas. We ourselves experience people who depart from the faith and/or are involved in practices reflective of unbelief. Jesus told us of people who will claim that He is their Lord, but are not, *"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter."* We ultimately will know the true state of the faith of others by what their choices end up being. *"They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us"* (1 John 2:19).

The disciple denounced (26:23-25)

Jesus' words to them, *"He who dipped his hand with Me in the bowl is the one who will betray Me,"* was a dramatic repetition of what He initially spoke to them about the betrayal. As with the practice of eating meals in the first century, each of the twelve disciples would qualify as one who *"dipped his hand with Me in the bowl."* Therefore, these words did not identify who His betrayer would be.

To dip his hand together in the bowl was a euphemism to describe their close relationship. Jesus' point then was that His friend, one of His inner circle, who shared a common bowl of food with Him, would betray Him. This treasonous lack of loyalty heightens the enormity of this betrayal.

Yet, more significant than the closeness of the relationship was the nature of who Jesus was. This is why Jesus then speaks of Himself as *"The Son of Man"* in verse 24. This betrayal will be done to the Messiah of Israel, the One the nation longed for.

Jesus also makes it clear that this betrayal was not a scheme that would bring about His demise by saying, *"The Son of Man is to go, just as it is written of Him."* While He would truly be put to death, Jesus will go according to God's prophetic plan for the Son of Man. Jesus, moments later, would encourage them by telling them He will come to them after He goes, *"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you,"* and *"Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful. You heard that I said to you, 'I go away, and I will come to you.'" (John 14:27-28).*

Jesus did not specify the passage that was written which would be fulfilled, however, there are Old Testament passages that teach various aspects of the Messiah's divine mission, such as *"He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth. By oppression and judgment He was taken away; And as for His generation, who considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due?" (Isaiah 53:7-8).* Peter would later emphasize to the 120 people, who gathered in this same upper room, that this betrayal by Judas was necessary in order to fulfill the prophecy of the Old Testament, *"Brethren, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. For he was counted among us and received his share in this ministry" (Acts 1:16-17).*

That Judas would be the means by which God used to fulfill the prophecy of the suffering Messiah for the sin of man and the betrayal of Psalm 41:9 did not diminish his personal responsibility for his sin, as Jesus made clear, *“woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born.”* The same deliverance of Jesus to the soldiers of the chief priests that resulted in such woe upon Judas, also brought about the deliverance from sin by the Savior of the world.

This betrayal is a demonstration of the truth of the co-existence of Divine sovereignty and human responsibility. The crucifixion was preordained, *“This Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death”* (Acts 2:23). Yet there will be judgment upon the sin of those who choose to rebel against the will of God. God’s sovereignty does not mean that anyone is forced to sin, for all who sin do so willingly. God works His will through the free choices of people and Judas chose what he wanted and God made a glorious good out of a treacherous evil.

The exchange between Judas and Jesus in Matthew 26:25 is unique to Matthew’s Gospel, *“And Judas, who was betraying Him, said, ‘Surely it is not I, Rabbi?’ Jesus said to him, ‘You have said it yourself.’”* Judas is compelled to ask Jesus the same question the other disciples asked Him.

The singular difference between what Judas asked and what the others asked is that Judas addressed Jesus as *“Rabbi”* while the others addressed Him as *“Lord”* (26:22). Judas also addressed Jesus as *“Rabbi”* when he betrayed Him at His arrest in Matthew 26:49. This was an honorific term that in that time was more formal than *“Lord”* would have been. To call someone *“Lord”* was akin to using the title of *“sir”* today. The title *“Lord”* was used as a synonym for God by the early believers and certainly Judas did not call Him the title the Scripture gives to Jesus.

Judas’ question was hypocritical for he knew he was betraying Jesus. As before, the rhetorical question, *“Surely not I”* implied a negative response, but in this case the expected answer could not align with reality. It was a completely disingenuous question moved by a desire to remain inconspicuous.

The Greek text of Jesus’ response was identical to what He would later say to the high priest in Matthew 26:64, *“You have said it yourself.”* This confirmed that Judas condemned himself, but to the other disciples, this was sufficiently vague to avoid them thinking that Judas would be the betrayer. Without alerting the other disciples, this answer communicates to Judas that Jesus is aware of his plans.

John 13:23-26 provides more detail about the identification of the betrayer, *“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.”* Therefore, John the apostle was the one disciple to whom Jesus revealed that He spoke about Judas.

While Jesus gave Judas the opportunity to repent, Judas continued with his plan. As a result of his continuing into this temptation to serve himself, John recorded, *“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”* (John 13:27-30). Judas completely submitted to the devil’s evil intentions, with his desires aligning with the evil one’s goals.

The disciples were clueless about what Jesus really meant by *“what you do, do quickly.”* This is evidence that John, the disciple *“whom Jesus loved,”* was the only one who heard Jesus’ words about the giving of the morsel. The others assumed there was a positive reason for Judas’ departure. This demonstrates the insidious and deceptive nature of evil, where one who is actively conspiring to deliver the Lord over to death was able to remain with the disciples without any sense of this on their part.

While John 13:30 places Judas’ departure before the upper room discourse, it is very likely that his departure also came before the Lord’s Supper. Jesus, Judas and John knew who the betrayer was and it is highly unlikely that such a one would continue with them though the Lord’s Supper. Judas will not be among those whom Jesus will drink the fruit of the vine at the coming of His Father’s kingdom (Matthew 26:29).

This betrayal of Jesus by Judas was the greatest evil in human history. This is because of the significance of the One who was betrayed, the personal involvement of the evil one, and the degree of knowledge that Judas rejected. Yet in this, God ordained the divine purpose that He intended in bringing about the salvation of many.

Conclusion

Judas would come to be known as *“the son of perdition”* or destruction through Jesus’ description of him in John 17:12. Jesus also referred to him as the devil when He said, *“Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?”* (John 6:70). Acts 1:25 tells us that *“Judas turned aside to go to his own place.”* Judas is consistently referred to as one who did not believe in Jesus, *“‘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”* (John 6:64).

As horrific an act as this betrayal was, we should know that it is only by God’s grace that we also don’t turn aside. Our perspective of Judas should be a reminder of the wonderful deliverance the Lord has granted to us, rather than a disdainful condescension of him. We must be thankful, for *“It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God”* (Hebrews 10:31).

Finally, we must remain humble regarding what we think we know about others. The closest followers of Jesus, who spent three years together with the Lord and experienced the same words and works, had no idea of the betrayal that was occurring among them. These eleven disciples would go on to become the foundation of the church (Ephesians 2:20), and yet they were unable to perceive the heart of Judas. Therefore, we ought to recognize that we too have limitations in understanding the spiritual condition of others.