



Mark 14:17–21

17 When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve. 18 While they were reclining at the table eating, he said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me—one who is eating with me.” 19 They were saddened, and one by one they said to him, “Surely you don’t mean me?” 20 “It is one of the Twelve,” he replied, “one who dips bread into the bowl with me. 21 The Son of Man will go

just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.”

Reflection

Today’s passage comes from Mark 14:17–21,

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Our passage begins with a happy scene. Jesus and his disciples are sharing a meal, after three years of living life together on the road. Three years of sleeping, eating, travelling together; the highs and lows, the sights they've seen, the miracles they've witnessed, the deep friendship and bond that has grown between them, the love that they share for each other and especially for their master, Jesus. Here they are, reclining at a table, there's food and wine, as these brothers for life celebrate one of the most important evenings in the Jewish calendar, together. Until the food

turns to dust in their mouths when Jesus says,

“Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me

At these words from Jesus, they're stunned, their faces drain of colour, and all merriment and joy is gone in an instant. There's shock, confusion, and hurt written on every face. They look into each other's eyes, 'Could it be you? Could it be you? I thought I knew you.' And then, an even more disturbing thought crosses their minds, almost simultaneously, and they each turn to Jesus, one by one and say,

“Surely you don't mean me?”

'Could it be me? Lord, surely you don't

mean me? It's not me is it Jesus? Tell me that it isn't me?'

But Jesus doesn't. To make matters worse Jesus doesn't even answer their question directly, one after the other, crestfallen, bewildered, insecure with a terrible fear rising up inside them they ask him,

“Surely you don't mean me?”

But Jesus doesn't answer them, instead he says,

20 “It is one of the Twelve,” he replied, “one who dips bread into the bowl with me. 21 The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better

for him if he had not been born.”

‘But we’ve all dipped our bread into the bowl with you, countless times!’ And then Jesus’ words dawn on them with their full force, and the whole bottom falls out of their world. Jesus is going. He’s leaving. Their whole identity and purpose is about to walk out the door. What are disciples without a master? What are followers with no-one to follow? Which isn’t even to speak of the pain at the prospect of losing someone they love so deeply.

And then there’s that word. Betrayal. With chilling eternal consequences. Betrayed by one of their very own. They can’t meet each other’s eyes, in fact they’re not much good for anything in this moment other than deep, deep sadness.

It's Judas' turn. He's experiencing very different emotions to the others, shock of a very different kind that he's trying to keep hidden. In fact, he's trying very carefully to mirror the reactions of the others, so he says to Jesus, just as they had,

“Surely you don't mean me, Rabbi?” Judas says in Matthew's gospel at this point.

Only Jesus does. The look in his eyes confirms it, even if his words, softly spoken and just for Judas, are enigmatic. Again from Matthew's versions, Jesus says quietly to him,

“You have said so.”

‘There's a confession in your looks and

in the tone of your voice Judas, but more than that, man looks at the outward appearance but I look at the heart. I know that you're about to betray me and when I said it would be better for that man if he had not been born I was speaking about you. You'll be held accountable for what you're about to do, but don't think for a moment that your wickedness undermines the sovereignty of God, you'll be held accountable but your treachery is coming to pass just as it was written in God's word centuries ago.

The story of Judas always fills me with great sadness and a good deal of healthy fear. Imagine following Jesus for three years, seeing what Judas has seen, the calming of storms with a word, witnessing thousands of miraculous healings, even

seeing Jesus raise people from the dead. Judas, along with the other disciples was even given power to heal and cast out demons, himself. How can a man witness all these things, do these things, become closer than brothers with the Lord of the universe, and then betray him for a few pieces of silver? The answer seems to be an addiction. The love of money. The incessant lure of the material world that Satan used time and time again to bait his hook, a nibble here, skimming a little off the top of the communal money bag, a nibble there, until finally he takes one big bite. 'Thirty pieces of silver, I can retire on that!' And that hook takes firm hold in his flesh and drags him kicking and screaming into the eternal fires of hell.

Think & Pray

I love Jesus, I try and walk with him daily, and so I find the story of Judas deeply disturbing. How about you? What's your weakness? How is Satan trying to bait your hook? Is it the lure of your career? Is it the lure of someone who is not your husband? Is it the lure of 1000 different material things that you quietly worship along with Jesus? What lust of the flesh or lust of the eye might be about to ruin your life? Destroy your most intimate relationships and friendship? Tear a hole in your church? What might you be about to do that you will regret for the rest of your natural life?

These are sobering thoughts but we all have a chink or two in our armour at which the devil is taking aim. Wake up to them to-

day. And pray earnestly to our Father that he might protect us from complacency and continually grow us by his Holy Spirit so that we might never go the way of Judas. Pray also that we'd be alert for those in our midst who might be struggling with an addiction like his that puts them and those around them in similar peril.

And yet there is a note of assurance in our passage as well. If you look closely, Judas couldn't bring himself to use the same words as the other disciples, despite the risk of him being found out. They said,

“Surely you don't mean me, Lord?”

But he said,

“Surely you don't mean me, Rabbi?”

(from Matthew's version)

Rabbi. Not Lord. And nowhere in the Bible is it recorded that Judas addresses Jesus as Lord. Because he wasn't his Lord and Judas was not saved. And for those of us who are saved, it is impossible for us to fall away. Romans 10:9 gives us this assurance, why not pray these words to close, all the while guarding your heart against complacency,

9 If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Go on, declare it, 'Jesus is Lord' and believe it in your heart and you will never fall away.