



Matthew 26:20–25

20 When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve. 21 And while they were eating, he said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.” 22 They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, “Surely you don’t mean me, Lord?” 23 Jesus replied, “The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. 24 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.” 25 Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, “Surely you don’t mean me, Rabbi?” Jesus answered, “You have said so.”

Reflection

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, Lord?”

‘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, Lord?”

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

“The one who has dipped his hand

into the bowl with me will betray me. 24 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 hands 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?”

Only Jesus does. The look in his eyes confirms it, even if his words, softly spoken and just for Judas, are enigmatic.

“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.

Think

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 on a par 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 today. 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?”

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.