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How Jesus Loves to the Uttermost
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I have a bone to pick with Pastor Mitchell. Often while preparing a series together Pastor Mitchell would tease that he would leave the hard passages to me. Perhaps you recall studying the book of Mark, in particular the Olivet Discourse in Mark chapter 13. That chapter is filled with difficult teaching. It's the one that talks about the "abomination of desolation that stands in the place where it ought not to be. Let the reader understand." I don't know about you, but I don't understand. Mitchell would say he was going to go on vacation when we got to Mark 13. Fortunately, we wrapped up that series before we got to that point.

Today we continue in the Upper Room Discourse and our passage is on Judas Iscariot, who will betray Jesus. I know that Mitchell was eager to preach this passage because it's an opportunity to exalt our Lord Jesus Christ who loves us to the uttermost. And I know it for another reason. Something always heavy on his heart. We will talk about that a little bit later.

Here in John 13, in the upper room, Jesus has just washed his disciples' feet and told them that he has set a beautiful example for them and that they should do as he has done. Jesus continues in verse 18, "I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill this passage of Scripture: 'He who shared my bread has turned against me. I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am who I am. Very truly I tell you, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me.' After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, 'Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray me' His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant. One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him. Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, 'Ask him which one he means.'

"Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, 'Lord, who is it?' 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, the son of Simon Iscariot. As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. So Jesus told him, 'what you are about to do quickly.' But no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to Him. Since Judas was in charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the festival or to give something to the poor. As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out and it was a night" (John 13:18-30).

The Disciples

Let's consider, the mindset, of those around that table on this evening. First, let's talk about the eleven disciples. We're leaving Judas for now and considering the other 11 and what led to this moment. What is going through their minds and what do they understand?

The disciples are here for a celebration, a festival. God did a wonderful thing for the people of Israel. He led them out of the bondage of slavery in Egypt by mighty acts of power. God has set them free. These mighty acts of power represent that God is with his people all of the way and is continuing to redeem them. There is a great redemption in the future.

This was not the first celebration that they had had with Jesus. For three years, the disciples were with Jesus and celebrated these festivals. Often these festivals were accompanied by difficult conversations and confrontations with the Jewish leaders. As they are going up to Jerusalem to celebrate this festival, some things happened that were uneasy for them. Jesus predicted several times that they were going into Jerusalem and that He would be turned over to the Jewish leaders and suffer many things, be crucified, and rise from the dead. There's a problem, though, clearly the disciples didn't really get what was going on.

Consider how surprised they are at the crucifixion and three days later they are shocked that he has risen from the dead. They know Jesus is talking about something terrible, but they do not have a clear concept of what is going to take place in Jerusalem. In fact, they enter Jerusalem to great celebration. They are welcomed joyfully by all the people. Jesus is announced to be the coming king! There is great anticipation that the Kingdom of God is at hand and it seems the wonderful things promised through the centuries are about to be accomplished. In this upper room, the eleven disciples hold a sense of anticipation. Even with the controversies, and the plotting of the Jewish leaders, there is a celebratory mood of eager anticipation.

Judas

And then there is their perspective on Judas. For three years Judas has been with them, and in this time, they have no indication that there was anything wrong with Judas. We have the benefit of hindsight. I think every time that we see the name of Judas in the New Testament, we think of him as the betrayer. But for three years, he was simply one of the twelve. John recounts the life of Christ and those three years of ministry with the benefit of hindsight and reminds us continually of "Judas, who would betray him."

Jesus knew about Judas—who helps himself to the money bag. But in the upper room at that moment, the disciples simply know him as one who prays with them, walks with them, and suffers with them. Judas is one of those sent out two by two and sees mighty things accomplished and comes back with them rejoicing. He is part of that band, a trusted member of the group of disciples. It is not insignificant that Judas holds the money bag. As they travel, if someone made a donation, it was passed to Judas and entrusted to him. Judas has charge of the finances. When the disciples need money, they go to Judas. He is a trusted, close

companion of the twelve disciples and of Jesus Christ himself. Every once in a while, Jesus says, "One of you will betray me." But He never indicates who, and they have no reason to suspect it is Judas.

Judas was chosen by Jesus. Mark tells us Jesus chose twelve disciples, "that they might be with Him." There is such import to that phrase. This wasn't just "hanging around." This is being with Jesus day in and day out, sitting at his feet, hearing his teachings, learning from him, and imitating him. Judas is chosen to be with him. Judas was with them in the boat. Remember the storm? And Jesus stands up and calms the storm. And the disciples worship him because they see him for who he is. Judas saw Jesus drive out demons demonstrating the power of God in the spiritual world, as well as the physical world. Judas saw Jesus divide the bread so that 5000 families were fed. And heard Jesus say, "I am the bread of life." He participated in all these things.

But we know too, that Judas was tempted. There is a growing avarice, a "greed" in the life of Judas. He has given up much. From time to time he helps himself with a little from the money bag. Not enough to get anyone's attention, but enough to meet some of his desire for money, Displacing his love for Jesus with his own greed. This growing avarice leads to a recognition that the Jewish leaders are looking for an opportunity to arrest Jesus. And Satan prompts him to think, *Go to them. You can get some money. All you have to do is tell them where he'll be alone.*

Judas makes that agreement. And now he is here in this upper room with the disciples, who have very little idea of what is about to happen that evening. Jesus will be arrested and will be crucified. The disciples have no clue. Judas reaches the decisive moment in his life. The sin had been growing. The plot is decided. Will he follow through with it?

The Table

It is helpful to understand what that table looked like at this festival celebration. Leonardo da Vinci's painting is beautiful, and many have found great meaning in it—but it's wrong. There is not a long table, and there are not twelve people sitting on chairs behind the table with a feast laid out before them. For a festival, low tables are laid out. I've had the opportunity to sit at a low table. I tried to get my feet under it and sit upright. But that is not what you do. It was likely a u-shape of several very low tables. With cushions around, possibly three to a cushion. And they would lean, with their feet stretched out behind them. Leaning towards the table on their left arm while eating with her right arm. Jesus is likely in the center of this, leaning on his arm and eating, and talking with the disciples.

Everybody could talk and fellowship together. And here is John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, reclining right next to him. Later on, when we read about John leaning against Jesus's chest and whispering a question to him, we can understand how easy that was to do. He just leans back and says, "Who are you talking about?"

We also know that Jesus at this moment is able to dip a piece of bread in what is likely a mixture of several fruits with a little bit of sour wine and hand it to Judas. Judas is not at the other end of the table. Judas is very likely right next to Jesus or very close to Jesus in a place of honor.

Jesus

Jesus is reclining at that table with his twelve disciples. In this position, we can understand what it was like for Jesus to get up and work his way around the table, washing each pair of feet stretched out behind the table. Jesus of course knows exactly what is happening. Jesus knows who will betray him and that the betrayal will happen that very night. Have you felt betrayed before? Has someone that you trusted stabbed you in the back? That's what Jesus is feeling at this moment behind that table. But he washes the feet of Judas, along with all the others as an act of love and service.

He even honors Judas in this moment by having him nearby. And most commentators agree, Jesus is making a final appeal in a gesture of love. We also know for certain that in the ultimate gesture of love, Jesus will go from that table to the cross, and on that cross, bear upon himself every single human sin, including that of Judas. He suffered for my sake and for yours, and he suffered for the sake of the Judases in this world.

Jesus now reveals to the disciples the betrayal that is about to take place. It's spoken in very simple words. Jesus is troubled in spirit and says, "Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me." We've already mentioned previously the idea of Jesus being troubled. We know that we do not have to dwell in trouble, but trouble comes our way and sometimes our minds can get caught up in that trouble. Jesus had this experience as well. Jesus was troubled at the graveside of his friend Lazarus. And here is troubled in his spirit at what will take place in his arrest, trials, sufferings, crucifixion, and death.

This is not simply an act of fate—something he knows will happen. He is ready for this. But Jesus also knows what Judas is about to do and his soul is burdened by this knowledge. John underscores Jesus' statement here. It literally reads, "Jesus testified and said 'Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me.'" This is a burden; a solemn moment as he reveals that one of *them* will hand him over. There are people who have been trying to get rid of Jesus, but it was one of their number, one of the trusted twelve who will be the one to hand him over.

This announcement has a profound effect on the disciples in their festive mood. Jesus has just honored them by washing their feet and told them they should serve each other in the same way. And suddenly, Jesus drops a bomb of shock and confusion among them. This is the last thing that they anticipated him saying. In confusion, they look at each other and an uproar arises around the table. The other gospels tell us they were all asking him and asking each other, "Is it you? Who is he talking about? Is it I, Lord?" And as this hubbub is going on, Peter, who is some distance away, we don't exactly know how far, indicates to John and says, "Hey, ask him who he's talking about."

And John leans back and says, “Who is it, Lord?” And Jesus says, “It's the one I'm going to give this piece of bread to.” This is a whispered conversation amid the hubbub. The only thing that the rest of the disciples hear is, “What you are about to do, do quickly.” The disciples don't know exactly what is going on.

Jesus has said somebody is going to betray him, but when Jesus says to Judas, “what you are about to do, do quickly,” the disciples are thinking that maybe he is gone for food. Judas still has the money bag. During Passover, it was traditional to give alms. The disciples think maybe Judas is going off to give Alms.

John, however, does understand what is going on. *Judas is going to betray Jesus? When? How? I wonder where he's going.* A number of commentators wonder why John didn't prevent Judas from going. There is much speculation, but clearly, John does not perceive exactly what is taking place. He is shocked, along with the rest of the disciples. Yet in preparation for that shock and confusion, Jesus tells his disciples four things.

Jesus Knows.

The first thing he wants them to know is that he knows. This didn't catch him by surprise. Jesus told them, “I'm not referring to all of you. I know the ones whom I have chosen.” He knows you. He knows me. He knows what's going on in our lives. He cares deeply for us and is preparing us for every tragedy, for every moment of dismay, for all of the shock and confusion when that will come our way in our life.

Jesus knows, and this knowledge is assuring. Jesus does not have to figure out another plan. He doesn't see what Judas is about to do and wonder how he will now establish the kingdom. He doesn't have to take a detour. He is neither disoriented nor deterred by the acts he will do. We have assurance that it's going to be okay because Jesus knows.

Scripture has foretold.

Second, Jesus assures the disciples that the Scripture has prepared them for what is coming. The Psalms are anticipatory of the Ministry of Jesus Christ. For a student of Scripture, this is no surprise. What is happening to fulfill this passage of Scripture? “He who shared my bread has turned against me” (Psalm 41:9). Jesus told the disciples it was there in the Scriptures. The Scriptures promise us as well. In addition to the ways that Jesus blesses us with abundance of life that we share together, Jesus also promises us there will be trouble and loss. There will be disappointment and confusion. Don't be surprised when that happens. Prepare yourselves. It is written but Jesus knows and it's going to be okay.

Trials strengthen Faith.

The third thing that Jesus wants to let His disciples know in this difficult moment is that rather than being blown off the path, their faith can be strengthened as they recognize who Jesus is.

He says to them, "I am telling you now, before it happens." He's very specific here. "I am telling you about the betrayal before the betrayal happens so that when it does happen, you will know that I am He." This phrase is imbued with meaning and power.

What Jesus says is, "I am telling you now so that when that happens, you will know that I AM." In the desperately human moment when I am turned over and arrested, you will know "I AM." I AM is the very name of God given to Moses in Exodus three. Moses looks at that burning bush and is commissioned by the LORD to go back to the Israelites and lead them out of slavery. Moses is terrified at this prospect and says, "What do I say when they ask, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" God answers, "I AM that I AM, this is what you shall tell them, I AM has sent me." The name that belongs to God and God alone and identifies Him in his uniqueness, glory, majesty, and His holiness. Jesus claims this name for Himself in the Book of John. Jesus' claims are reinforced powerfully again in the moment of his betrayal. But Jesus has prepared his disciples for this difficult moment.

Haven't we seen how he's prepared us for the difficult moments? I've talked with so many people these last couple of weeks about the little things and the big things that God has done to prepare us for the difficult moments in our lives. And the things God has done tell us about the Great I AM who is so very concerned over the details of our lives. He is constantly at work. We can believe.

Go out with His authority.

The fourth thing Jesus tells them is that they go out with his authority. "Very truly, I tell you, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me, and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me." As I studied this I wondered why the middle of this narrative is about betrayal (v.20). But a closer look shows us that Jesus goes back and forth between the idea of betrayal, who He is, and what the disciples are supposed to do next. This is one of the developing commissions Jesus gives to the disciples. "I am about to be betrayed. I will be rejected. You're going to be rejected, too. But when you're rejected, don't forget, if they reject you, they're rejecting me. And if they reject me, they reject the Father who sent me. If they accept you, they're accepting me and the Father who sent me. I am sending you in my name. No matter what happens, acceptance, rejection, betrayal, or glorious fruit, it is all because of the authority of Jesus Christ at work in those whom He sends.

How great is the love of our Savior here? He is himself so deeply troubled over the events about to unfold, yet he is concerned for his disciples. They are confused and disoriented. Their hopes have been crushed. The crucifixion of Christ will be devastating to these twelve. But Jesus assures them of who He is and of what that means for them.

Jesus has something that He wants Judas to know as well. and that is that he is still gracious toward him. We don't read it directly, but we see it in the things Jesus does and some of the things does and says in this moment, in the hours before His betrayal. Jesus has already served Judas by lovingly washing his feet. And honored Judas by having him at his side or nearby, and

by giving him this piece of bread. Jesus quotes Psalm 41, “the one who shares my bread has lifted up his heel against me.” That Psalm is the sum of a suffering, righteous man betrayed by a dear friend.

In Near Eastern culture, in inviting someone to your table, you are actually extending your protection to them and honoring them. And they enter into an unspoken covenant of honor with you. You share a meal with a friend and someone that you trust. Out of those 12 disciples, Jesus extends that piece of bread to only one of them, and that is to Judas. Commentators have spoken of this as the last token of Jesus's love before the betrayal. The sharing of the bread is a personal moment and a decisive moment in the career of Judas. It is, another has said, a final act of astounding love and appeal.

At this moment, it is not too late for Judas. The plot has led to a decisive moment. In response to this act of love and appeal, we see Judas make a final surrender to the power of darkness. What terrible things take place in the following verses as that piece of bread is offered to him? Judas has an opportunity for repentance. Yet, he brazenly takes it. The die is cast. The decisive moment passes and Satan enters into him.

What a terrible thing. Satan is real. He is personal. And he desires to enter in and take control. There are only two places in all of John's writings, where he writes of a person entering into another person. In Revelation 3:20, Jesus is talking to the lukewarm church of Laodicea and says, “I stand at the door.... If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.” What a beautiful picture and what a dark contrast. Judas rejects Jesus and is filled up with Satan and goes out to accomplish one of the darkest deeds in human history.

The final phrase in this passage is terrifying. “Judas went out and it was night.” For John, *night* is not merely a time of day. Night is a place of no spiritual light. Jesus says to his disciples in chapter nine. “A time is coming when I will not be working among you the night is coming.” In Chapter 11, he says, “night is when people stumble because they have no light in them.” At the end of the Book of Revelation night is gone because Jesus, in all of His glory, is present. But Judas goes out into the night. The place where Jesus is no more. He goes into what's described as outer darkness and eternal condemnation.

Why?

Mitchell's heart's desire was to preach this passage. He and I had so many conversations and have prayed together for those who may be among us, enjoying the blessing of fellowship, experiencing joy and sorrows right alongside us, but not to belong to Jesus Christ. what happened to Judas was not a random event that caught him unexpectedly. It was a process that had been going on in his heart for a long time. And he confirmed himself in that unbelief and sin and passed away out of Jesus' presence.

Paul tells the church at Corinth, "Examine yourself." Each one of us should take a moment to examine ourselves. *Am I of the faith? Is Jesus Lord of my life?* I'm not talking about the nagging doubt we all experience at times. I'm talking about the one who doesn't take that doubt to the feet of Jesus and cry out "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief." When we ask these questions, what we hear from Jesus is, "I know my own." And the response to our hearts cry is to hear the voice of the Shepherd and to run to him. Jesus says, Put your trust in the light while there is still time. The decisive moment is now. Oh, may we cry out to our Savior, Lord Jesus.

Father, encourage us in our trials with that great truth, of the presence of Jesus Christ. We pray for the work of Your Holy Spirit in our midst, through your Word. Amen.

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