

STUDY NOTES

THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST **BETRAYAL**

WELCOME

In pairs try to name famous people who have betrayed someone else. Share your findings and discuss if they have anything in common.

WORSHIP

Sing or listen to '*Draw me close to you....*' (Mission Praise 980)

WORD

Introduction:

Tom Wright in his book '*John for Everyone*' tells the story of a Farmer outside of Cambridge who had trouble loading his sheep when taking them for slaughter. Instinctively the sheep seemed to know that this was not a good trip and would not load well. The local slaughterhouse came up with a solution. They took one of the sheep and kept it at the slaughterhouse so it got used to it and the slaughterhouse workers. When it came for the time to go and pick up the sheep from the farmer the slaughterhouse workers would take their one sheep with them. Sure enough the other sheep followed this one sheep into the van with no problem and they were taken off to the slaughterhouse to be killed.

The slaughterhouse men called this one sheep **Judas**.

This rather chilling story captures one person's **response to the announcement by Jesus of his forthcoming death** that we considered on Ash Wednesday. (notes available on website for those unable to join us).

In this short series, **The Passion of the Christ**, we are looking at **three responses** to this announcement which John locates within Holy Week, the last week of Jesus life. The following weeks we will look at Peter and then Mary, sister of Martha and Lazarus.

Read John 13 v18-30

In this passage we have the character of **Judas**. With hindsight he is often portrayed as the 'baddie' from the beginning. Even the gospel writers cannot help themselves and sometimes add an editorial note earlier on as to Judas being the one who was going to betray Jesus.

For instance John himself writes with the benefit of hindsight

But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him.

John 12 v4

Similarly in many paintings of the disciples Judas is portrayed as the villain in the group when this is not the picture we gain of him in this passage.

He was one of *'the twelve'* and **fairly indistinguishable from the rest of *'the twelve'***. This is clear when Jesus announces that one of them is going to betray him (v21) as none of them had a clue as to who it might be.

The disciples stared at one another at a loss to know which of them he meant.

V22

Peter mentions to John, the likely identity of *'the beloved disciple'*, to try and illicit from Jesus who it was. **Here John himself appears to be contrasting his closeness to Jesus with Judas betrayal.** The physical proximity as he was reclining next to him (v23) enabling him to whisper to Jesus, is **an indication of intimacy and love.** It was the custom to undertake the Passover reclining rather than standing as freemen reclined whereas slaves as the Jews had been in Egypt, would have stood. The particular closeness of John to Jesus is noted throughout this Gospel. Here it appears to throw into contrast the close friendship of John to Jesus compared to the betrayal of Judas.

Judas was one of them.

- He had his feet washed too.
- He was to share in the Passover too.

When Judas left, the others thought little of it perhaps he was running an errand for Jesus or as keeper of the purse going to give money to the poor (v29) which would have been part of the daily habits of a rabbi and his 'school of disciples'.

Judas was one of them.

Isn't that the point that **if we open ourselves up to deep friendship then there is the possibility of deep love and at the same deep betrayal.?**

Judas is not just one of them but he is also one of **us**.

The juxtaposition of the closeness of the beloved disciple and the one who was going to betray him reminds us that **we are equally capable of intimate love and devastating betrayal.**

Group Leader

Perhaps pause for a moment and allow the group to absorb the implications of that statement.

There are two questions that arise

Why did Judas do what he did? Why do what we do?

I want to suggest three reasons.

The passage states

'As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him.'

V27

Wright claims that this reference to Satan entering him is not the same as the other Gospel writers when they mention people who are demon possessed. John in his gospel hardly ever mentions demon possession but he does mention darkness and light.

*The light shines in the darkness,
but the darkness has not understood it.*

John 1 v5

The ending of this passage hints at this as John states

*As soon as Judas had taken the bread he went out.
And it was **night**.*

John 13 v30

This is not just a physical description but seems to indicate that the time left when the disciples will have the light with them is drawing to a close.

*You are going to have the light a little while longer.
Walk while you have the light before **darkness** overtakes you.*

John 12 v35

Satan entering Judas appears to herald a deepening of that darkness and casts the actions of one man's betrayal, our betrayal, in the context of a much bigger picture of a **cosmic battle** that John hints at throughout his Gospel.

The word *Satan* = *accuser* and is a legal term for one who brings a charge against someone for the prosecution. It is Jesus who is '*in the dock*' and Judas is being used, as we can be, by the forces of darkness to bring an accusation against Jesus, the messenger of the light. Yet Judas is no mere puppet. I don't go along with some who claim that Judas was predestined to do this anymore than I think we can claim we were forced to betray Jesus by our actions because something took us over. I do believe in the forces of darkness but also believe that we have a choice as Judas had a choice. Even in this episode, at this late hour, Judas had a choice.

Jesus answer to John when asked who it was who was going to betray him replies

*It is the one who I will give this piece of bread
when I have dipped in the dish.*

John 13 v26

The **taking of this bread** seems to be the critical moment and many commentators suggest that Judas could have declined it. Perhaps he was close to Jesus too and even heard what Jesus had whispered to John.

Perhaps Judas was in the sit of honour. John, the beloved disciple on one side and Judas on the other.

Whatever the case it is the action of taking this bread that John in his gospel notes allows Satan to enter into him. (This is the only time that John uses the title Satan).

Why do we betray Jesus?

Because there are the **forces of darkness** that are very real that are playing out their power plays at another level that we need to take very seriously.

Yet at the same time we cannot use this as an excuse for actions. We cannot claim *'diminished responsibility'*.

Judas knew what he was doing even if he was not aware of the powerful forces that he was allowing in. I think we know what we are doing most of the time but unaware of the forces of darkness that seek to manipulate us to their sinister motives.

Group Leader

Allow time for a discussion concerning group member's awareness of the reality of spiritual forces of darkness.

Why did Judas betray Jesus? Why do we betray Jesus?

The scriptures tell us little but we pick up a few hints here and there which may give us a clue and this leads me to a second suggestion that of **anger**.

In John 12 while Jesus and his disciples were at Bethany prior to the entry into Jerusalem, Mary took a pint of very expensive perfume and poured it over Jesus feet and wiped his feet with her hair. We will return to this story later in the series but here we note Judas reaction. He is angry.

*‘Why wasn’t this perfume sold and the money given to the poor?
It was worth a year’s wages’*

John 12 v8

Some have speculated that Judas was disillusioned with Jesus and type of Messiah he was turning out to be.

Who was this who allowed this woman to do such a thing?

Who was this who would appear to turn down every opportunity to be declared a King who would overthrow the Romans and restore the pride and status of God’s people?

- Following the feeding of the 5,000 Jesus withdraws to a mountain when the crowd want to make him King. (John 6 v15).
- When the crowds on Palm Sunday cry hosanna to the King Jesus follows this by a prediction not of victory but of his death. (John 12 v20-34)

There is some evidence to suggest that Judas was part of a group who longed for a political overthrow of the Romans and was linked in some way to the leading figures in the Jewish leadership.

Whatever the case **we perhaps can identify with the anger** Judas may have felt towards Jesus when Jesus **has not done what we expected him to**.

Perversely we like Judas may **feel betrayed by Jesus** and this can lead to anger with him and we become the accuser.

- Where were you when my Mum died?
- Where were you when the people of Haiti or Chile suffered so grievously?
- Where were you when I didn’t get what I deserved?
- Where were you when wicked men prospered?

Anger used properly can be tremendously powerful to right the wrongs of society and can further the kingdom of God. Jesus demonstrated this when he cleared the money changers out of the temple. But anger against God, a growing frustration towards the ruler of the universe and his ways of doing things, is a truly dangerous thing.

As God said to Job

*Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge?
Brace yourself like a man and I will question you,
and you will answer me.*

Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundations?

Job 38 v2-4a

God continues

*Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him?
Let him who accuses God answer him!*

Job 40 v1

Judas never came back to the Lord as Job did or as Peter did, as we can. We know that his remorse did not lead to repentance but to the angry act of taking his own life. It's my life and I will do with it what I want to is part of the creed of our age. It is such an isolating creed. It speaks of control and being controlling and we need to take the warning of Judas and his anger very seriously.

There is a way back but if we don't take it.....

Group Leader

In what ways do we seek to deal with our anger towards God?

(Please allow people to be honest without trying to correct them at this stage as to admit that you are angry with God is a very important first step.)

Why did Judas betray Jesus? Why do we betray Jesus?

Another motivation for Judas betrayal appears to be **greed**.

John certainly hints at this.

*He did not say this because he cared about the poor
but because he was a thief
as keeper of the money bag
he used to help himself to what was put into it.*

John 12 v6

We know that Judas betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver which symbolically was the price of a slave.

He prompted the question

'What will you give me if I betray Jesus to you?'

Matthew 26 v15

He was promised 30 pieces of silver. The Old Testament tells us that this was the price of a slave. Jesus was sold like a slave. One man's price, for the freedom of the world.

This is ironic when we recall the words of St Paul who claimed to the Christians in Philippi that Jesus was

*Being in very nature God
Did not consider equality with God
something to be grasped
But made himself nothing
Taking the very nature of a servant
Being made in human likeness.*

Phil 2 v6-7

Avarice the love of money is endemic in our society.

We live in an age when we are known not for what we produce but rather what we consume. Once more like anger, the creation of wealth can be used for the extension of the Kingdom. (Luke 19 v13) We also know that Jesus was supported by women who were connected to influential and powerful people. (Luke 8v3)

Yet overriding this Jesus warns against the **love of money** and wealth. That grasping nature, that seeks to store up treasure for ourselves on earth. (Matt 6 v24)

We are a generation who know the price of everything and the value of nothing.

Because that is what the love of money does.

*It seriously skews our sense of values, our priorities
our understanding of what is right and wrong.*

David Bracewell, '15 Minutes to Wake the Dead' (Zoe Ministry: Guildford, 2009) 75

Greed then can be seen as part of the reason that Judas betrayed Jesus and we too can be infected by this deadly condition that can ultimately result in us losing everything.

Group :Leader

List some of the positive uses of money and also some of its negative uses?

In what ways are we in the West blind to the greed that is endemic in our society?

Conclusion

Combined,

- the power of the **forces of darkness**,
- the **anger** of Judas, that sense of being betrayed by Jesus,
- the **greed** of Judas, that avarice that puts self and self interest as the overriding way of living;

is a combination that appears to come together on this night.

It leads to **isolation**.

It is Judas who leaves and goes out into the night on his own.

He chooses to leave behind

- his fellow brothers
- and his Lord who he has been following for three years.

Doesn't every part of you ache to cry out '*come back!*'

Come back to the fold.

Come back to the Shepherd.

Trust him even when you don't understand when you are confused when you are angry when you feel that God has let you down.

Come back and find what you have really been looking for not through

- an anger that can consume
- or a greed that can eat you up

but in a **fellowship**, a relationship of intimacy where once more like John you can lean back against Jesus.

WITNESS

Perhaps you can think of those who have gone off into the night and your heart aches for them right now.

Perhaps they are caught up in something bigger than they can see and you know how deadly it is.

Perhaps there is a lot of anger to be faced,

Perhaps there are deep seated ways of living in our twisted consumer age when the very fabric of society is being destroyed as each looks after him/herself.

Group Leader

Spend some time as a group praying for people that you know who are in this situation and for our nation

The warning of Judas is that betrayal is deadly but it is curable.

- We don't have to be overwhelmed by the forces of darkness because *in Jesus there is a light that will not be extinguished.*
- We don't have to live in a constant state of anger, because *in Jesus we can find peace (shalom) that passes all understanding*
- We don't have to live as everyone else does, because *in Jesus there is sufficient for all that we need and he gives us the treasures of the kingdom*

It is curable but

- it means taking seriously the spiritual battle that Jesus is engaged with. (**engage in the prayer life of the church 24/7 prayer – 9.00 prayers**)
- it means we don't have to be consumed by anger **but face it,**
- it means dealing with deep rooted ways of living, **changing practical ways of living**

Come back until it is too late. There will come a time when Jesus will return and bring all those who love him to himself yet those who do not know him will be cast into outer darkness. There is a consequence to our actions, we cannot claim diminished responsibility.

Until that time we live in an age of grace, the opportunity to turn betrayal into deep love to be like John not Judas remains.

Group Leader

Allow time for individuals to receive prayer ministry if that is appropriate perhaps in another room away from the rest of the group.