

Right Place at the Right Time

Matthew 26:14-25

Betrayal is one of the most painful things a relationship can endure. Many famous stories are based on a conflict revolving around a betrayal. One of my favorite fictional stories is the Count of Monte Cristo by Dumas. What makes the story so riveting, is the intensity of the betrayal. But what makes me want to read it again is the outcome. In the story, a close but jealous friend, Fernand, betrays Dante to steal his fiancé. The betrayal places Dante in an unescapable prison for life. Hopeless situation both for Dante and his fiancé. Dumas's story reveals themes of vengeance, justice, forgiveness, and mercy. Another captivating and more valuable story of betrayal is the true story of Jacob's son Joseph, who was thrown into a pit and then sold into slavery in Egypt. His attackers were his own brothers who were filled with jealous hate. This story draws you in quickly to see what will become of both Joseph and his brothers. While the conflict of betrayal seems to hold a central theme in the story of Joseph, it was a means to an end. God worked powerfully through betrayal, heartache, and trials to save many lives and to create a nation. Joseph states to his brothers, "what you meant for evil, God meant it for good to save many". Our God was in total control, even when Joseph sat at the bottom of a pit, worked as a slave, and endured prison. Joseph had plenty of time to contemplate vengeance but as God was with him, he also thought on mercy, forgiveness, and faith. For Joseph to forgive his brothers, it required him to see God's big picture and to surrender to it. A Godly perspective.

In today's passage we will look at the betrayal of Jesus by Judas Iscariot. This evil plot was less about betrayal as it was more about the fulfillment of God's purposes. I will contrast the different perspectives to this betrayal, and I will explain why this betrayal reveals our God is always in control and should be trusted.

The passage has three parts, and I will work through each part individually.

Then one of the twelve, whose name was Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests¹⁵ and said, "What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?" And they paid him thirty pieces of silver.¹⁶ And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray Him.

The first time I read this full passage I was irritated with how much of it Judas Iscariot took up. In fact, the passage is bookended with him...starts and finished with his wretchedness. Why give so much textual space to this hypocrite, this imposter? Why preach a sermon about him. But to honor the Word and the impact of this betrayal, I need to tell you more about this character. Judas Iscariot was one of the twelve apostles. According to Mark 3, Jesus appointed the twelve that they might be with Him, and He might send them out to preach. We know the Lord Jesus always did what was pleasing to His Father. The appointment of Judas Iscariot was not a mistake. It was not a lack of discernment. This appointment had purpose; it was part of God's plan.

So, what else do we know of him? We know he is not to be confused with the other apostle Judas, the brother of James who is also called Thaddaeus or Lebbaeus. Beyond this, we do not have any other back story as to when and where he started following Jesus. I believe Judas was an incredible actor, a talented conman who cared more for money than loyal friendship. None of the apostles suspected it was him, even when he left the dinner table right after Jesus told them of the soon betrayal. I don't think they thought betrayal would be due to a love of money but due to unbelief that Jesus was the Messiah. Judas Iscariot loved money, and to do what he was about to do, he certainly did not believe Jesus was the Son of God. Judas sold out the Lord for 30 shekels. Let's consider this sum. In the book of Exodus, 30 shekels was the cost to replace a slave that had been accidentally killed. In Jesus's day, we see the value of a shekel by the story where Peter took a shekel from the mouth of fish to pay taxes for him and Jesus. It was not a lot of money. Imagine the insult, the Prince of Peace sold to the hands of evil men for the cost of a slave. Last week in Stan's sermon, we saw Mary pour out an extravagant gift on Jesus. A gift of great worth. A year's wage. Mary's estimation of Jesus was accurate, He is worth more than our greatest possession. John 12 states Judas was upset about this "waste" because he wanted access to anything of value. You see, he kept the money bag for the apostles and John tells us with hindsight, Judas was a thief. Possibly sensing his time with Jesus was coming to an end, Judas gets to the chief priests before they would get to Jesus. No missed opportunities for this guy. Judas was glad to receive whatever the chief priest would offer. There was no

bartering, he took their first offer. This payment, after its shameful return, would eventually buy a cheap potter's field that would become an unmarked graveyard for strangers. Listen to this prophecy concerning Judas and the priests. In Zechariah 11:12: And they weighed out as my wages thirty pieces of silver. Then the Lord said to me, "throw it to the potter" the lordly price at which I was priced by them. So, I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord, to the potter. These 30 pieces of silver that Judas received is spoken of again in Matthew 27 when Judas is overwhelmed with guilt that Jesus is condemned to death, he goes back to the chief priests to return the money and throws it into the temple. But the priests can't keep it because it is blood money. So, they found a loophole, they could buy the potter's field to bury strangers thus fulfilling Zechariah 11.

Judas was eager to keep his end of this evil plot. Satan moved him to sell out Jesus and later we'll read he betrayed Jesus with a kiss, another sign of Satan's wicked involvement. Jesus had done nothing to Judas worthy of such contempt. Jesus welcomed him with friendship, love, teaching, and a front row seat to the world's greatest story. I want to shift our focus now back to Jesus.

Look at verses 17 to 19 with me. Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Where will you have us prepare for you to eat the Passover?" ¹⁸ He said, "Go into the city to a certain man and say to him, 'The Teacher says, My time is at hand. I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.'" ¹⁹ And the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover.

Jesus tells the owner of the house, "My time is at hand". The hour of His death is approaching. Jesus would be keeping the Passover one last time in His earthly life and Luke 22 quotes Jesus saying He earnestly desired to keep the feast with His disciples. The Passover lamb would be slain and eaten the first day of the week of unleavened bread. Our Father in Heaven wanted Jesus to be betrayed, arrested, and killed on the Passover. Just like the spotless lamb that was without blemish was kept safe right up to the moment that demanded its death, those that wanted Jesus dead had to wait until God's chosen time. Why would the Passover be so important? The Passover was instituted in the book of Exodus where God was going to send a destroying angel to kill all the first born in Egypt as judgment on Pharaoh. The only way for the first born of Israel to survive was to take a spotless lamb and to kill it. Then they had to wipe its blood on the door posts and the lintel. Moreover, they had to eat the lamb, fully partaking in both the shedding of blood and the body sacrifice. The book of Hebrews 9 reminds us that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. Later in this chapter of Matt, when the Lord institutes the Lord's Supper, what we call communion, He speaks of the blood of the new covenant and His body, they had to drink and eat what represented His blood and body. Again, this showing full participation in His upcoming self-sacrifice. Our communion services remind us of His sacrifice, His broken body, and His shed blood. The Lord was connecting Himself to the Passover. He was the sinless, spotless lamb to die so that many would be saved. Jesus was providentially at the right place at the right time.

So why such hurtful betrayal. One answer to that question is so scripture would be fulfilled. Another reason is that it exposed the spiritual battle that Satan was raging against Jesus. And in my opinion, Judas represents a lot of mankind who have received kindness and generosity from the Lord Jesus and have betrayed Him, turned their backs on Him for short term pleasures of this life. Look with me now at the last 6 verses.

²⁰ When it was evening, He reclined at table with the twelve ²¹ And as they were eating, He said, "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me." ²² And they were very sorrowful and began to say to him one after another, "Is it I, Lord?" ²³ He answered, "He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me will betray me." ²⁴ The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born." ²⁵ Judas, who would betray Him, answered, "Is it I, Rabbi?" He said to him, "You have said so."

God's ways are not our ways. Here is Jesus, with His appointed 12 friends. He greatly desired this moment, this Passover meal with these guys. And one will betray. This warning would have absolutely rocked the apostles! This betrayal of Jesus would also been a betrayal of the whole group. To betray the master would be to betray His disciples. What I marvel at is that they all asked, "is it I". Were all of them wrestling with doubt or thoughts of leaving Jesus? OR was it some ancient Hebrew way of saying, "don't look at me! I really don't know. But Judas joined in with them as to not look different. In those days, to share bread and the same dipping bowl with someone revealed fellowship and trust. To share

bread at Passover revealed an even deeper religious connection. This made the betrayal so ugly, so grievous. It also would have created an incredible amount of confusion and sadness for the disciples. Psalm 41:9 Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me. This psalm of David speaks to this so-called trusted friend who received bread and returned the favor with utter contempt. To make the betrayal sting even more, John 13 reveals Jesus getting up from this moment of the dinner and washes all of the disciples' feet, including Judas. If Jesus knew, why wouldn't He stop him? They all would have been happy to lock Judas up or worse. Jesus's hour was at hand, His time was up. Judas is allowed to continue on His twisted path to fulfill scripture, but not without a stiff warning. Jesus reveals non-existence would have been better for the betrayer. His day of judgement was coming but that was not for Jesus at this time. Remember, Jesus' mission at this time was to preach the Gospel and to redeem sinners, it was not to condemn or pour out wrath. John 3:17 God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.

Summary: Now is a good time to take a step back from today's verses to see the context of this whole chapter. It will paint a fuller picture as we consider the betrayal story. All of this chapter 26 is this fast-paced crescendo of evil closing in on the Lord Jesus. It's also a step by step, perfectly timed and choreographed Heavenly act full of grace and mercy. Each of the characters were at the right place at the right time, even Judas Iscariot. You have heard it said, "Perspective is everything". Let's look at a couple perspectives. From the darker perspective of evil closing in, let me list some points that could have been very discouraging to Jesus; chapter 26 starts with a reminder that the chief priests are plotting to arrest and kill Him. Imagine the pressure of knowing a group of men out there hated you and could not wait to kill you. How disappointing was it for Jesus to correct all His disciples for being disgusted with Mary's ointment she lovingly poured out. He knew that His friend and follower Judas had given in to the devil and sold Him out for the cost of a slave. He knew that a great crowd would come for Him and all His disciples would abandon Him. Then Peter takes it a step further and publicly denies Him. Jesus would have felt like the whole world was against Him and He was going to face the cross totally alone. He was right.

Let's look now at the Heavenly perspective of this seemingly disastrous situation. In verse one Jesus states prophetically that He will be crucified on the Passover. Bad news but He knows the plan. Then Mary's generous act of love was to prepare Him for burial. Bad news but God moved Mary to anoint Him for burial. He celebrates the Passover with His friends and prophetically warns of a betrayal within the twelve. A special time with those closest to him was not ruined because He knew what was happening. He knows the chief priest will arrest and kill him, He knows all His apostles will abandon Him, He knows He has to do this alone. His knowledge of bad things happening to Him and His willingness to continue deeply blesses me. His expectation of fulfilled prophecy is incredibly encouraging. God's redemptive plan required not just the sending of His only begotten son, but His suffering and death. Unfortunately for the Son of Man, the Lamb of God, suffering and death was mandatory. Fortunately for us, sons of Adam, His death and shed blood is what fully paid our debt of sin. He took the punishment we deserved. Bad news for good news. This was God's plan, and it was perfect. None of these attacks on Jesus were a surprise. All of Satan's attempts to thwart God's plan either fulfilled prophecy or were turned around somehow to glorify God. The visible rage of Satan and his demons grew more and more evident the closer Jesus got to the cross. But God still gets the glory. Prophecy of these events are a bold reminder that God has authority over the good and bad.

Application: We should now come back to the story of Joseph. We see eventually in His life, his prophetic dreams concerning him came true. His brothers did bow down to him in Egypt. We see him reconciled to his family. Moreover, God's promises concerning Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob becoming a great nation, and receiving the promise land would also come true through the Exodus from Egypt 430 years later. When we look at plans and purposes of God throughout all time, we should be overwhelmed with evidence that He is in control. When things seem out of control and feel like they are closing in, we should consider His precious Word, which has stood the test of time and many critics. His word states He loves us, sent His son to die for us, promises us the Holy Spirit to comfort and guide us in this life and promises to come back for us so we can receive our inheritance with His son. Those promises are attached to hundreds of fulfilled prophecies, we should believe them.

What do you see in the difficult times in your life? Do you just see evil closing in? Do you feel peril without any hope? God has not lost control and He has perfect timing. Look at the life of Christ. He was faithful to the end. He endured

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Pastor Mark Idol

threats, suffering, and even death. Hear these verses; Heb 12:2b-3 For the joy set before Him He endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him who endured from sinners such hostility against Himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

Saints, surrender your whole life, including your trials to God. Let God take what Satan intended for your destruction and convert it for your good and the good of others. God is in control, and we should trust Him.