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Predestined Betrayal

Series: The Gospel of Mark • 48 of 48

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And the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the Passover, his disciples said unto him, “Where wilt thou that we go and prepare that thou mayest eat the Passover?”

And he sendeth forth two of his disciples and saith unto them, “Go ye into the city and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water. Follow him. And wheresoever he shall go in, say ye to the goodman of the house, “The Master saith, ‘Where is the guest-chamber, where I shall eat the Passover with my disciples?’” And he will shew you a large upper room furnished and prepared. There make ready for us.

And his disciples went forth and came into the city, and found as he had said unto them; and they made ready the Passover.

And in the evening he cometh with the twelve.

And as they sat and did eat, Jesus said, “Verily I say unto you: One of you which eateth with me shall betray me.” And they began to be sorrowful and to say unto him one by one, “Is it I?” And another said, “Is it I?”

And he answered and said unto them, “It is one of the twelve that dippeth with me in the dish. The Son of man indeed goeth, as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! Good were it for that man if he had never been born.”

Our observation of Jesus’s ministry now sees his final gathering with the twelve in his earthly ministry.

It’s Passover time. For each group of Jews in Jerusalem, a lamb would be killed. And in continuation of the ancient practice, the lamb will be cooked and eaten.

The disciples ask Jesus where they can go to eat this Passover meal. Now you’ll remember no doubt they stayed regularly in Bethany, in the house of Mary. But the Passover meal had to take place within the boundaries of the city of Jerusalem. This festival attracted tens of thousands of pilgrims, and the locals would be expected to open their houses to help accommodate this influx.

Jesus sends out two disciples on an errand to locate a place he’d already chosen (v13-15). This might remind you of a similar task when Jesus sent two disciples to bring him a colt he wanted to ride into Jerusalem on. We considered then whether Jesus had made prior arrangements or it was more a case of Jesus exercising his power and foreknowledge.

The same discussion takes place with this incident. But there are some clues which would lead us to believe this is indeed a direct use of Jesus’s ability to do the miraculous. For

example, the disciples are told to look for a man carrying a container of water, but this job was normally done by women. Some will suggest Jesus arranged for a man to be carrying water so he'd be instantly recognisable by the disciples. The problem with this idea is there could well have been more than 150,000 people in and around the city at that time. There's no way the disciples would have spotted one man, so that doesn't sound like a good plan.

(You might like to read first Samuel chapter 10 later on. That has an even more elaborate prediction of this kind which occurred exactly as planned.)

Both this and the story in chapter 11 show the circumstances happening precisely the way Jesus said they would. I think we're meant to see a likeness between the two. There were two disciples involved in each, and there's a phrase eleven words long seen in both accounts.

Even in his final hours, when he might appear to have lost control, he gives us these indications that all things are falling out according to God's purposes.

There may be more to this mysterious arrangement than a show of his divine nature. If he reveals the address now, Judas might go and tell the authorities, whereas Jesus needs to have this final meal with his disciples.

By the way: the common image of this last meal is the one seen in Leonardo da Vinci's painting, *The Last Supper*. The portrayal is inaccurate in many ways, but I'll mention just one: they wouldn't be sitting on benches around a table. They'd be reclining on couches while eating.

Some believe this room has survived. Unsurprisingly, it's been turned into a shrine, attracting a multitude of visitors every year. But don't go packing your bags just yet! As fascinating as it would be to visit that very room, I doubt it survived. God had the brass snake Moses made destroyed so it wouldn't become a focus of idolatry. I suspect he did the same with this room.

So these two disciples are sent ahead to prepare the banquet. The owner of the property clearly knew who "The Teacher" was, and he makes the place ready for them. Maybe he'll cook the Passover lamb for them too.

The betrayal: Jesus's announcement

There's not much mention of the Passover meal itself. Mark, it seems, doesn't want to have his readers distracted by those details. He fast forwards to near the end of the meal.

Then comes the announcement. *One of you, eating with me right now, is going to betray me*. One of those close to him. One of his friends. These had been in his company daily for the best part of three years.

We see in verse 19 they each asked if it was them who was the betrayer. "Is it I?" is an accurate translation, but it doesn't convey the right sense. They were asking the question with the full expectation they'd receive a reassuring answer from Jesus telling them not to worry because it wasn't them. We might paraphrase it like this: *Surely, it's not me, is it!* So

although it appears each was panicking it could be them, their attitude was rather one of confidence it *wasn't*.

In the next few weeks, we're going to witness this gang of loyalists abandoning Jesus by running away. But think on this: the real time between their confident assertions they'd never abandon Jesus and their running away in fear was just a few hours. The betrayal and abandonment of Jesus would take place **that night**.

I said a moment ago Jesus had displayed some of his divine power when he engineered that errand he sent the two disciples on. But we know Jesus was fully man too. And when John wrote his account of this last meal, he included a relatively minor but sad point. It says Jesus was troubled within. He was clearly getting nervous and worried at the prospect of what he'd face in his final day on earth.

The betrayal: God's purpose

Let's have a think about these two different aspects of this betrayal by Judas. Our passage shows us this betrayal was ordained by God, even though it was carried out by Judas.

Several times up to this point, Jesus had clearly told his disciples he was going to be killed. He didn't present it as a risk but as a certainty. And the lesser prophets who went before him described what was going to happen centuries later. Here's one from Isaiah:

Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. Yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted.

Isaiah 53:4

Isaiah speaks in the past tense, perhaps as a way to emphasise the certainty of the death of this victim, the Messiah. And he tells us the Messiah is to be smitten—hit—by God. The God of heaven would inwardly **beat** Jesus. Whatever eternal batterings were due to us as sinners, **they were all redirected onto the soul of our saviour**. And he did this for the multitude of his elect people.

We also see Daniel describe the striking down of the Messiah and the end of the temple age:

And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself; and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary.

Daniel 9:26

And this "cutting off" of the Messiah, with all the treachery, loneliness and criminality, was performed according to the wise and sovereign will of God.

The reason God ordained it so was that it was *necessary*. Think about yourself, friend. Think about the immeasurable number of sins you've committed in your life. No matter how big or small, they were each offences against the highest law. A standard so perfect the slightest fault in keeping it brings the death sentence.

They are the rules in God's universe. **You have to die.** Not a painless snuffing out. Not several life sentences lasting a few hundred years. The weight of your offences was so great your punishment would have to go on and on without end.

But then we come to God's election. He chose to create a way to save some of us. In false religions like Islam, we find God being merciful to some in forgiving their sin. Obviously, Mohammed didn't spend enough time thinking when he was inventing his new religion. Because his is a god who forgives people by putting aside his own justice. I put this point to a group of Muslims one day, which hopefully gave them something to think about.

The truth is God cannot simply show mercy in that way. If he determines to show mercy, it cannot be at the expense of his justice. In other words, **someone still has to die.** His justice allows him to carry out the punishment due to you on another.

But who? The judge can't pick some other human to take your place. That ruins the picture of mercy, seeing as an innocent third party would have to suffer. **The only way around it is for the judge himself to take the punishment.** And our Lord God Jesus Christ, the judge of all mankind, did EXACTLY that.

For this and other reasons, it was essential that Messiah would be killed in place of his people. In one of his open-air preaching sessions, the apostle Paul spoke of this necessity:

...and Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, opening and alleging that "Christ must needs have suffered and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ."

Acts 17:2-3

Were it not for this incredible provision, brethren, every one of us would share an eternity of sorrow with each other. And this is the fate of many. We point friends and relatives to an escape route, and they ignore us. They prefer to trust in the majority or assume the godless scientists must be right. When they all go to that place together, they won't even have the comfort of each other's company as consolation. They're never getting out of their prison, so there's no light at the end of the tunnel to comfort them. All that faces them is a sad, lonely existence, and all those moments they rejected the gospel will haunt them for ever.

The betrayal: Judas's guilt

We've said a bit about how God was ultimately behind all these events, even the betrayal by Judas. And yet, in a mystery of God, the guilt of the act is still with Judas.

If the atonement was necessary, then all the events which led to it were also necessary. Listen to what Jesus himself says as he prays to his father in heaven:

While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name. Those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost but the son of perdition, that the scripture might be fulfilled.

John 17:12

The treacherous departure of Judas from the company was just another necessary component in the machine that was God's salvation.

Yet it should be obvious to you Judas was not forced into this act against his will. Had he not wanted to betray Jesus but found himself forced into doing so by an almighty God, he could not rightly have been held accountable for his act. All that he did was in accordance with his own will at that time, and God rightly holds him guilty.

We said last time Judas had a real lust for money. When that expensive perfume oil was used up on Jesus, Judas had no thoughts apart from money ones. Even after Jesus had explained why this woman had done something right, all Judas could think about was the money he could've made.

In verse 21 it says the Son of Man will be taken just as it was written, but the betrayer is still responsible for his actions. We could extend that to our own situation. From a theological viewpoint, we could say the sins we've committed were part of God's ordaining actions. But the fault lies with us! The folks at New Road looked at this mysterious truth recently in our midweek Bible study.

You'll read elsewhere in the gospels it was said that Satan entered Judas. Jesus even said Judas was a devil. Yet even if we factor in this influence of Satan on Judas, **it still doesn't remove one iota of his guilt**. When he takes his turn to stand in the dock in the courtroom of God, with his former friend as judge, he can try all defences he wants. None of them will work. His act of betrayal, just like the multitude of his other sins, was carried out with all his heart, and the Lord will declare him guilty on all counts.

What makes this betrayal especially tragic is it was done by one who claimed to be a friend of Jesus.

Many Christians can testify they can take all manner of abuse from this world, but when a friend turned on them it was a terrible experience. If you've ever had a friend, especially a Christian friend, turn on you unexpectedly, you'll understand this sort of pain. It's similar to your spouse cheating on you if you're married. You think through the many good times you had with the friend, and the memory of every one will from then on be tainted with the thought they were insincere.

In one of those Psalms which seems to speak about the saviour, we read this:

Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lift up his heel against me.

Psalm 41:9

And to heighten the seriousness of the treachery, the thoughts of it would come to a head during a meal. Most Christians I know love eating together. It's just as common in the world, of course. It's part of human nature to enjoy social interaction, and the sharing of food accentuates this.

In the ancient Semitic society Jesus and his disciples lived in, eating together was even more important. It was one of the clearest indications of friendship, so for a betrayal to have its culmination in this expression of comradeship was especially despicable.

Without naming him, Jesus pronounces a condemnation on the one who would betray him. *Woe to that man*, he says. The word can mean “horror”. Jesus was promising that pure horror was coming Judas’s way.

Conclusion

We’ve seen how in just one act, God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility for his own sin is seen. We can study this truth all we want. We can draw up sophisticated explanations for how this can be. We can debate it for the next thousand years. **As long as we continue to believe it.** As long as we never allow our tiny, finite intelligences to conclude either that God is not behind evils like this or the perpetrator is not fully responsible.

As we think about this meal, we see the great irony of the Passover lamb being eaten by the true lamb of God it pictured. And this was not only the last time Jesus would eat the Passover; this would mark the end of the Passover for all time!

Jews to this day celebrate a kind of Passover but with the most important elements missed out. Even some Christians will celebrate it, although we trust it’s only to experience something they read in the Bible and not carry it out according to its original purpose.

The real Passover Lamb had come. And he was slaughtered. And although we don’t eat his flesh literally as the papists claim, we nevertheless feed on him by faith. If you’re not a believer, that might sound a bit strange. It just means by trusting in Jesus day by day it’s like were eating that Passover lamb and receiving all the benefits of it. Let’s read a bit more from Isaiah’s prophecy:

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth. He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter. And as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment. And who shall declare his generation? For he was cut off out of the land of the living. For the transgression of my people was he stricken.

Isaiah 53:7–8

He was struck down out of the land of the living for the transgressions—the sins—of his people. Who are his people? All those who at some point in their lives surrender their whole lives to Jesus Christ.

You who are believers: is it any surprise we’re told to take part in the Lord’s table ritual frequently? Jesus himself tells us this Holy Communion service will remind us of what the core of the gospel is. Someone died. *The son of God* died. And he did that 2000 years ago so you believers watching today can enjoy all the benefits of salvation.

And those who are not yet believers? They have only to go to God in prayer, repenting of their sins and being willing to accept Jesus Christ as the great Passover lamb who was killed in the place of others.

Such love!

Amen.