

## The Troubling Story of Judas

John 13:18–30

Studies in John #30

**M**ANY years ago one of the most popular television preachers was the Orange County preacher, Robert Schuler. I mean, who wouldn't want to wake up Sunday morning for "The Hour of Power"? One of the things he developed was the *Possibility Thinkers Bible* highlighting all the positive sounding verses in the Bible. If only the Bible were *that* easy! I've been reminding you over the past couple of years that *all* the words of Scripture are the Word of God therefore we need to read them and profit from them. Amen? Whether we've been in the Psalms, Job, Daniel, Haggai, and now John, we need to follow the Holy Spirit's wisdom in giving us all the Word in the way it comes to us. I say this—again—because our text is full of trouble.

The troubles we see here have been foreshadowed as early as Jesus' bread of life discourse in 6:70. He's said a betrayer would arise from within his own close disciples: "Did I not choose you, the twelve? And yet one of you is a devil." That shadow has loomed over the Gospel like the marine layer that makes everything dark in otherwise sunny San Diego until six days before Passover. While at Lazarus' house, Mary anointed Jesus' feet with expensive ointment and wiped his feet with her hair. Then we read this:

But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, “Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it. (12:4–6)

In chapters 13–17 we’re in an upper room before the Passover when “Jesus knew that his hour had come ” (v. 1). **During that supper the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot...to betray** Jesus (v. 2). Don’t miss the huge theological importance that ties together the story of Scripture: as with the first Adam so with the second the devil was at work. When Jesus washed his disciples’ feet Peter objected, “**Lord, do you wash my feet? You shall never wash my feet**” (vv. 6, 8). But “**if I do not wash you, you have no share with me**” (v. 8). So **Peter said...“Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!”** (v. 9) Jesus’ analogy is not so strange: “**The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean**” (v. 10). It means that like you take a bath and are clean but then your feet get dirty so you need to rewash them in the same way Jesus has already washed his disciples’ sins but there is need for continual cleansing on the way of life. So he tells them, “**And you are clean, but**”—here’s the payoff—“**not every one of you**” (v. 10). What did he mean? **For he knew who was to betray him** (v. 11). Let’s look at THE TROUBLING STORY OF JUDAS together.

## TROUBLING WORDS (VV. 18–20)

Our story of Jesus and his disciples sharing a meal continues in verse 18 where Jesus says, **“I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen—reminding us of 6:70. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, ‘He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.’”** Since Jesus cites Psalm 41:9, let’s turn there.

Psalm 41 closes out the first book of the Psalter and like Psalm 1 it opens with a beatitude: “blessed (אַשְׁרֵי) is the one who considers the poor!” (v. 1) That word “poor” (דָּל) is not only those in financial distress; it’s those who are vulnerable. Praise God Jesus loves the vulnerable: “though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9). Amen? Although Jesus, and the Psalmist before him, came to the aid of the vulnerable no one came to his aid: “My enemies say of me in malice, ‘When will he die, and his name perish?’” (v. 5) Jesus came to his own, but his own did not receive him (John 1:11) as they tired of his teaching, were calloused to his care, and hated his healings: “all who hate[d] him whisper[ed] together...imagin[ing] the worst for” him (v. 7). We’ve seen how the religious elite in Judea gathered and discussed how to “put him to death” (John 11:53). The result of this hate was that Jesus’ “close friend,” Judas, “in whom I trusted,

who ate my bread, has lifted his heel [an image of turning his back and betraying] against me” (v. 9). Listen to the emotional words in Psalm 55:

For it is not an enemy who taunts me—then I could bear it; it is not an adversary who deals insolently with me—then I could hide from him. But it is you, a man, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend. We used to take sweet counsel together; within God’s house we walked in the throng. (vv. 12–14)

Here’s one of the big questions and applications I want you to think about: why is Jesus revealing this prophetic fulfillment to his disciples *now*? Look at verse 19: **“I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he”**—ἐγὼ εἶμι—*I am*. That was Jesus’ big reveal in chapter 8 to describe himself as the LORD at the burning bush in Exodus 3. Again, the question is why *now*? Jesus is preparing his beloved for his death, which is going to bring great trials like they’ve never experienced on them. Eventually many of them will die martyrs’ deaths. What Jesus is saying to his disciples and us is that who he is, is what we need to cling to when the trials start, when the storms hit, and when the hardship goes on and on. There’s a reason God’s promises in Jesus Christ are called “a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul” (Heb. 6:19). The gospel hymn says it like this:

Standing on the promises that cannot fail,  
when the howling storms of doubt and fear assail,  
by the living Word of God I shall prevail,  
standing on the promises of God.<sup>1</sup>

## TROUBLING ACTIONS (VV. 21–30)

Jesus troubling words bring tremendous blessing for those disciples and those of us who put our trust in Jesus as Messiah and Son of God. But when we say, “Freedom isn’t free,” what do we mean? It means for you to be free it costs someone else. There’s great blessing for us in Jesus but at the cost of *great trouble for Jesus: after saying these things, Jesus was troubled* (ἐταράχθη) **in his spirit** (v. 21). He actually said this himself in prayer to his Father earlier in 12:27: “Now my soul is *troubled*” (τετάρακται). What’s so amazing to consider is that for us in the cesspool of sin to enter into the celestial joys of paradise it took the Son of God taking upon himself true humanity so much so that he experienced everything that it is to be a fallen human being except sin. As the church fathers were fond of saying, “God become man that man might be led back to God.” Also note that Jesus’ true humanity is affected with trouble even though Scripture prophesied the Messiah would be betrayed a thousand years before and Jesus knew this prophecy was being fulfilled particularly in his own disciple, Judas. He truly was “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isa. 53:3). Our Heidelberg Catechism tells us that Jesus’ sufferings were not merely on the cross, but “that during his whole life on earth, but especially at the end, Christ sustained in body and soul the wrath of God against the sin of the whole human race” (Q&A 37). Because of his trouble he **testified**, “**Truly**,

truly”—there’s that solemn vow language again—ἀμὴν ἀμὴν, “**I say to you, one of you will betray me**” (v. 21).

This led to *great trouble among the disciples*: **the disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he spoke** (v. 22). Jesus was troubled in his spirit and now his beloved disciples were, too! He just dropped a bomb on them! The servant is not greater than his master. So troubled were they that as **one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was reclining at table at Jesus’ side...Simon Peter motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking** (vv. 23, 24).

Those of us old enough to remember will laugh when they hear this phrase: “enquiring minds want to know.” Again we notice that while the disciples are panicked, Peter’s impetuous! **So that disciple**—most likely the Gospel writer John—**leaning back against Jesus, said to him, “Lord, who is it?”** (v. 25) So if you’re a fan of Renaissance art, I’m going to burst your bubble! Leonardo da Vinci’s, *The Last Supper*, is most certainly *not* how Jesus and his disciples were dining together. They weren’t sitting upright at an Italian table but in the typical eastern way. There was a table in the center, elevated couches on three sides allowing for someone to access the table and serve, and the men leaning on their left elbows around the table. How do we know this? John **was reclining...at Jesus’ side**, which is not quite the imagery John uses. He says *in*

*the bosom or chest of Jesus* (ἐν τῷ κόλπῳ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ), which is a similar phrase John used to describe the Son “in the bosom of the Father” (εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς; 1:18). Then John says he was **leaning back against Jesus**, which again, is not quite the image: he was leaning *upon the chest of Jesus* (ἐπὶ τὸ στῆθος τοῦ Ἰησοῦ). As John was leaning on his left elbow on the couch, he was facing away from Jesus so when he went to ask Jesus Peter’s question, he had to lean back into Jesus.

This is important because of what’s next: *the great trouble by Judas*. **Jesus answered, “It is he to whom I will give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it”** (v. 26). At the Passover Feast there would’ve been a dipping sop of bitter herbs mixed with dates, raisins, and sour wine. We read that Jesus **gave it to Judas** (v. 26) and that Judas **had taken the morsel** (v. 27). Imagine the scene again. The closeness of John also implies the closeness of Judas, whom it seems was behind Jesus’ back as Jesus was to John’s. Why? Because of the ease with which Jesus passes him the morsel.<sup>2</sup> Why is this important? In this kind of seating or leaning arrangement, the couches and those on them would’ve been arranged according to places of honor. Just think of James and John’s mom requesting that Jesus place her sons at Jesus’ right and left.<sup>3</sup> The arrangement of John in relation to Jesus means Judas was in the place of

honor! He's been loved by Jesus! (v. 1) He's been privileged by Jesus to be in charge of their moneybag! (12:6) He's been served by Jesus! (v. 26) He's been seated in honor next to Jesus!

But look at the trouble and tragedy of Judas: **after, Satan entered into him** (v. 27). Not wanting to delay the inevitable, **Jesus said to Judas, "What you are going to do, do quickly"** (v. 27). After all, it was Jesus' hour to fulfill his mission to die. While the disciples still hadn't the foggiest **why Jesus said this to Judas**, thinking innocently that **because Judas had the moneybag, Jesus was telling him, "Buy what we need for the feast," or that he should give something to the poor** (vv. 28–29). But Judas knew: **after receiving the morsel of bread, he immediately went out**. When? What seems like an innocuous insertion says it all: **and it was night** (v. 30). Ever since chapter 1 light has been contrasted with darkness: "the light shines in the darkness" (v. 5); Nicodemus came to Jesus by night because he was afraid of the Pharisees (3:2); "I am the light of the world" (8:12).

There's a lot of trouble, here, isn't there? You may not have realized yet that you're in this spiritual trouble, too. Flee the darkness to the Light! Some of you who believer might be worried about being a Judas. Let me encourage you as Ryle said, "the strongest Christian is the one who feels his weakness most."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> From the hymn, “Standing on the Promises” by Russell Kelso Carter (1886).

<sup>2</sup> Carson, *John*, 474.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 20:20–28.

<sup>4</sup> Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: John 13:1–21:25*, 32–33.