

Sam Storms
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Sermon Summary #4

The Treachery of Judas Iscariot and the Sovereignty of God over Sin

John 13:1-32

This may sound a bit strange, but there are some things in the Bible that are not so much to be understood as they are to be trusted. Here's what I mean. The Bible is meant for our instruction. God moved on the hearts and minds of its authors over a 1,500 year period to record his revelation of what is true and right and good. In doing so, we also have in the Bible a revelation of what is false and wrong and evil. The Bible is there for God's people to lead us into what we should believe and how we should behave. And for that we should be eternally grateful.

But not everything in the Bible is equally easy to understand. In fact, there are things revealed to us in Scripture that are profoundly challenging and often don't seem to us to make much sense. That is why I said that there are some truths in the Bible that are more to be trusted than understood. What I'm talking about falls under the heading of *divine mysteries*. These are truths that challenge our common sense. They appear to run contrary to our sense of right and wrong. They befuddle and confuse us. But that doesn't mean they aren't true. It simply means *they often transcend our ability as finite human beings to fully understand*.

There is no escaping the fact that you and I come to the Bible with preconceived notions of what we believe is right and wrong, good and evil, fair and unfair. And often we end up twisting and torturing the biblical text to make it conform to what we *want* to be true. We misinterpret it in such a way that it might align with what we already believe about life and reality. And that is certainly true of what we will look at today in John 13.

So I'm asking all of us, myself included, to set aside what we might *wish* were true and listen to what God says is *actually* true. Set aside your preferences and personal opinions and what you think is fair or unfair and listen closely to what God says. *If you and I genuinely believe that this book is inspired, and I certainly do, then what it says must be given final, determinative authority in what we believe as Christians, even when what it says appears to run counter to what we wish that it would say.* With that in mind, let's turn our attention to the story of Judas Iscariot and his role in the betrayal and ultimate crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

Who was Judas Iscariot?

There is perhaps no name in the vast scope of human history that is more readily identified with evil and deceit than that of Judas Iscariot. One might think that there is very little we can learn from his life other than that we should strive to not be like him! But Judas is instructive for us on several levels, not least of which is what his experience teaches us about *the sovereignty of God over human sin*.

History records for us all sorts of apocryphal and mythological stories about Judas. The apocryphal writing titled, “The Story of Joseph Arimathea,” says that Judas was the nephew of Caiaphas, the high priest, who was sent by his uncle to join up with Jesus and infiltrate the band of disciples. There is no evidence at all that this is true.

In “The Acts of Pilate” we come across this fascinating tale. Judas allegedly went home after betraying Jesus and found his wife roasting a chicken. When he told her he was planning to kill himself because he was afraid that Jesus would rise from the dead and take vengeance on him, she replied that Jesus could no more rise from the dead than the chicken she was cooking could jump out of the fire and cackle: at which moment the chicken allegedly did just that!

A 12th-century document claimed that Judas’s parents threw him into the sea soon after his birth, believing him to be demon-possessed. He survived and grew up to marry a beautiful older woman who he later discovered was his own mother! Again, such myths abound, but are just that: myths.

So what do we know about Judas that is true? We know that the name “Iscariot” most likely means he was a native of Karioth, a village located south of Judea. We first hear his name in Luke 6:12-16 where he is chosen by Jesus to join the inner circle of 12 disciples. It is instructive that Judas is typically referred to as “**one of the twelve**” (see Matt. 26:47), most likely to heighten his treachery. It is not that Judas was “one of the crowd” or “one of the Pharisees” or “one of the arresting party.” He was “one of the twelve,” i.e., one of those with whom Jesus was most intimately associated and to whom Jesus had wholly entrusted himself.

We can’t be certain why Judas accepted the invitation of Jesus, but there are several possibilities. Some argue that Judas was a Jewish patriot who saw in Jesus an enemy of the people and therefore betrayed him in the interests of God and country. Others contend that Judas saw himself as a loyal and devoted servant of Jesus and of the kingdom of God he proclaimed. The idea is that Judas assumed the role of traitor to force Jesus to manifest his miraculous powers and call down from heaven the angelic host to deliver him, all for the purpose of immediately establishing the Messianic kingdom on earth.

The likelihood is that Judas joined the 12 because ***he saw in Jesus the one person who could deliver Israel from Gentile/Roman oppression and re-establish the nation as sovereign in her own land.*** Our Lord’s consistent refusal to make his mission political and his open declaration that he would soon die in Jerusalem spurred Judas to take action. If he could not be assured a prominent place in the coming Messianic kingdom he could at least profit personally by turning over Jesus into the hands of his enemies. Thus ***it was a mixture of disillusionment, frustration, and greed that prompted his treachery.*** But of course, there is also the role that Satan played, as is made undeniably clear from what we read in John 13:2.

God’s Sovereignty in Seven Scenes

What I now propose to do is to set before you seven truths from John 13 that I am persuaded are unavoidable. They may not strike you as plausible, but they are. And the measure of our commitment to the functional authority of Scripture is seen in whether you and I are willing to trust what the Bible says even if we don’t fully understand it.

(1) Satan was instrumental in the death of Jesus by stirring the heart of Judas Iscariot to betray him. We read this explicitly here in John 13:2 – “During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray him.” Later, in John 13:27 we read that “***Satan entered into him.***” In other words, Satan didn’t merely put the idea in Judas’s head. He himself entered into Judas the man. Judas was possessed by the Devil. We read much the same thing in Luke 22:3-6 –

“Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve. He went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray him to them. And they were glad, and agreed to give him money. So he consented and sought an opportunity to betray him to them in the absence of a crowd” (Luke 22:3-6).

Two things are deserving of our attention here. First, the fact that Satan “put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot . . . to betray” Jesus ***does not alleviate Judas from moral responsibility for the treachery of his deed***. We come across similar language in Acts 5 in the incident involving Ananias and his wife Sapphira. They had earlier pledged to give to the early church a percentage of the proceeds from the sale of their property. But then they held it back. We read in Acts 5:2,

“But Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God.’ When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it” (Acts 5:3-5).

The involvement of Satan in the sin of Ananias did not relieve Ananias of his responsibility for the deed. That he was regarded by God as fully responsible and morally accountable for the sin he committed is seen in the fact that he was instantly killed. God disciplined Ananias, and later his wife Sapphira. Nowhere do we read that either of them was exonerated simply because “Satan filled” their heart to lie to the Spirit. Evidently they could have chosen to resist Satan’s prompting, but they didn’t. They were entirely complicit with his activity.

The same may be said of Judas in John 13. Satan “put it into the heart of Judas” to betray Jesus but Judas himself is alone held morally accountable for his treachery. ***So what is the relationship between the will of Judas and the prompting of Satan?*** I can assure you that Satan did not move on the heart of an innocent man who would otherwise have done what was right. We know that Judas was a thief (see John 12:6). He had carefully hidden his real motives from the other 11 disciples. But as we’ll see in a moment, Jesus knew from the beginning that Judas was a wicked man whose heart was already filled with treachery. Satan’s role is real and the timing was his to determine, but Judas will not be able to stand at the judgment throne of God and insist on his innocence by saying: “Wait a minute, God! The Devil made me do it!” No he didn’t.

The second question that v. 2 brings up is this: ***“Why would Satan work to have Jesus betrayed and ultimately crucified?”*** After all, on several occasions prior to this point in time he had attempted to *prevent* Jesus from going to the cross. Let me mention two.

The first occurred in the wilderness temptation. There the Devil tried to get Jesus to forego the path of suffering and to gain authority over the kingdoms of the earth by bowing down and worshipping him. On three occasions the Devil in essence said: “If you are really the Son of God, and I don’t doubt that for a moment, demonstrate that you have a right to reign over all the universe.” The text quotes Satan as saying, “All these [kingdoms of the world] I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me” (Matt. 4:9).

The second occurrence is described in Matthew 16:22 where Jesus predicted that he would soon suffer many things at the hands of the religious leaders and eventually be killed by them. Peter had the audacity to “rebuke” Jesus and said: “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.” Instead of commending Peter for his love and bravery, Jesus said: “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the

things of God, but on the things of man” (Matt 16:23). Satan was using Peter to try to prevent Jesus from going to the cross.

So, if all that is true, what in the world is Satan doing here in John 13:2 stirring the heart of Judas to betray Jesus? I can’t be certain, but my sense is that by now Satan has come to realize that he can’t prevent the crucifixion. There was nothing Satan could do now to stop Jesus from dying. “Therefore, he resolved that if he couldn’t stop it, he would at least make it as ugly and painful and as heartbreaking as possible. Not just death, but death by betrayal. Death by abandonment. Death by denial (Luke 22:31-34). Death by torture” (Piper, *Spectacular Sins*, 101).

(2) Judas Iscariot was never born again. He was never saved. We must never think that Judas was genuinely saved and later apostatized and “lost” his salvation.

We know this from what we read in John 13:10-11.

“Jesus said to him [to Peter], ‘The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you.’ For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, ‘Not all of you are clean’” (John 13:10-11).

Let me remind you again of the significance of the foot-washing so that you might see what Jesus is saying about Judas. In the second of two sermons on the error of Hyper-Grace I described for you in some detail ***the distinction between, on the one hand, having been once-for-all-time cleansed of the guilt and stain of sin and, on the other hand, the need for daily, progressive cleansing from sins committed.*** I believe this is what we see here in John 13:10-11.

When Peter insisted that Jesus wash not only his feet but also his hands and head, Jesus said something profoundly important: “The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you.” Of course, in saying that, he was speaking of Judas.

Judas Iscariot is not “clean” but the other eleven disciples are. In saying to the eleven, “you are clean” (John 13:10), Jesus is saying, “Your sins have been forgiven. Your guilt has been washed away. You are born again. You have eternal life and have become the sons of God. You are saved!” Only Judas is excluded from this cleansing. On the other hand, “You Peter, and the others also, are clean because you are saved and forgiven. You have been washed and therefore, to use the words of v. 8, have a ‘share with me,’ that is to say, you are in eternal union with me; you are in a relationship with me that will last forever.”

However, says Jesus, even though you have this eternal union with me, even though you “share with me” in a relationship of love and righteousness that will carry you safely into eternity, ***you still need to have your feet washed.*** Why? The reason you need to have your feet washed, perhaps even on a daily basis, is that although you are in eternal union with me you still have to walk the streets of this dirty, sinful, fallen world. And your feet are going to get dusty, dirty, and muddy from the sins you will still commit. Your experiential, daily communion with me can be disrupted and damaged by the dirt of sin that comes from living in a fallen world with the principle of sin still present in your soul.

You only need to be washed once. Once you are truly washed clean by faith in me, born again and justified and declared righteous in my Father’s sight, you never need to bathe again. Notice: “The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean” (v. 10). ***The bath you have taken through faith in me has forever and finally cleansed you of all guilt that might bring you under God’s wrath and lead to condemnation.*** But just because you are completely clean and now have eternal union with God ***does not mean your feet won’t ever***

get dirty. Thus the repeated washing of the feet symbolizes the need for daily confession of our sins, daily repentance from our sin, and turning to Jesus again and again for the experiential application to our hearts of what he accomplished at the cross.

If we want to “experience” the nearness of Jesus in new and fresh ways, if we want to enjoy fully the blessings of our eternal union with him, if we want to live in the peace and hope and satisfaction that he has died to bring us, we will need to continually keep our feet clean! There are daily sins that call for daily cleansing. And this cleansing comes about only when we respond to the convicting work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, confess honestly and openly how we have failed, and trust in the faithfulness and righteousness of God to forgive us.

(3) Jesus was not surprised by the treachery and betrayal of Judas Iscariot. He knew what Judas would do even before he called him to be one of the twelve. Look again at vv. 11, 18-19 –

“For he [Jesus] knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, ‘Not all of you are clean’” (v. 11).

“I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, ‘He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.’ I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he” (John 13:18-19).

We also know that Jesus was well aware of Judas’s intentions because of what we read in John 13:27 – “Jesus said to him [Judas], ‘What you are going to do, do quickly.’” This isn’t the first time in John’s gospel that we read about how Jesus knew from the beginning that Judas would betray him.

“‘But there are some of you who do not believe.’ (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him)” (John 6:64).

“Jesus answered them, ‘Did I not choose you, the Twelve? And yet one of you is a devil.’ He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the Twelve, was going to betray him” (John 6:71).

Nothing catches God by surprise! And note this well: the fact that Jesus knew in advance that Judas would betray him does not get Judas off the hook. You might be inclined to think otherwise. You might be inclined to say: “Well, if it is *certain* that a person will commit a particular sin, that person cannot be held morally accountable for it.” But we know it to be otherwise, not only from this incident, but also from what we read in Acts 4 about the crucifixion of Jesus. There Peter said this:

“for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place (Acts 4:27-28).

Note three things: *First*, Herod, Pontius Pilate, together with Roman and Jewish leaders consciously and willingly conspired against Jesus to murder him. *Second*, this decision on their part was predestined by God to occur. *Third*, God’s hand in predestining this to occur does not alleviate or excuse any of them from the guilt of having crucified the sinless Son of God. I don’t believe that because it makes good sense to my way of thinking. I believe it because the Bible teaches it, not only here but in numerous other places. And I have immeasurably greater confidence in the infinite wisdom of a perfectly holy God than I do in my own powers of reasoning.

(4) The fact that Jesus knew in advance and prophesied the betrayal by Judas is evidence that he, Jesus, is God.
Look again at John 13:18-19 –

“I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, ‘He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.’ I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he” (John 13:18-19).

What does Jesus mean by this? Is he merely saying that when everything is over and the disciples look back on his prophecy of the treachery of Judas that they will believe more confidently than they currently do that Jesus is the Messiah, that Jesus is who he claimed to be? If that is the case, then we should translate this as: “I am he,” that is to say, “I am the promised Messiah.”

Or could it be that Jesus is telling them once again that his ability to perfectly prophesy the future is proof to them that **he is Yahweh in human flesh**? If that is the case, we should translate this simply as: **“I am.”** That’s right, **Jesus is claiming to be the “I am” who revealed himself to Moses in the burning bush. Jesus Christ is the great “I am that I am” in human flesh!** On several occasions in John’s gospel we find a similar claim:

“I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am [he] you will die in your sins” (John 8:24).

“So Jesus said to them, ‘When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am [he], and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me’” (John 8:28).

“Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am’” (John 8:58).

I believe that each of these declarations is an allusion to Isaiah 41:4 and 43:10-13 –

“I, the Lord, the first, and with the last; I am he” (Isa. 41:4b).

“You are my witnesses,” declares the LORD, “and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me. I, I am the LORD, and besides me there is no savior. I declared and saved and proclaimed, when there was no strange god among you; and you are my witnesses,” declares the LORD, “and I am God. Also henceforth I am he; there is none who can deliver from my hand; I work, and who can turn it back?” (Isaiah 43:10-13).

Don’t ignore the magnitude of this: Jesus is saying to them and to us today: “Look at my power to prophesy the future with absolute certainty and perfection. **Such is proof that I am the great I am!**”

(5) The fact that Jesus knew in advance that Judas would betray him was both troubling to Jesus and at the same time part of God’s sovereign purpose.

We read in John 13:21 that “Jesus was **troubled** in his spirit, and testified, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.’” To say that Jesus was “troubled” means that this entire scenario of his betrayal by Judas hurt; it was painful; it was unsettling. To contemplate such a horrific sin against you by someone to whom you have only and always done what is good, is disconcerting and deeply disturbing to the soul.

I know what you are thinking: “If God had ordained from the beginning that Judas would betray Jesus, and if Jesus himself knew from the beginning that this would occur, why would he be troubled or disturbed?” The fact that Jesus was “troubled” when one of his closest friends betrayed him does not mean he didn’t know in advance that it would happen. On many occasions in Scripture we read that when what God ordained to happen actually happens, God is grieved and burdened and troubled. Here is the theological truth that the Bible calls on us to trust and believe even if we don’t fully understand it: ***God is often pleased to ordain his own displeasure.*** That is to say, in order to maximize his own glory he often ordains that things occur that *in themselves* are displeasing to him. Although in and of themselves, considered in isolation, they may be *displeasing* to God, God may be *pleased* to ordain them in view of the higher, long-term purpose they serve to magnify his holiness, power, and grace.

God ordains and prophesies in advance events that when they occur still cause him grief and sorrow. They cause him grief and sorrow not because he is caught by surprise by their occurrence but because he is holy and pure and righteous. If you continue to struggle with how a righteous God can ordain that unrighteous events take place and then feel grief when something happens that he foreknew would happen, I can only encourage you to trust his wisdom and goodness even when you don’t understand it.

(6) The betrayal of Jesus by Judas reminds us that even the most wicked and unbelieving of people can deceive us into thinking they are Christians.

For three years Judas walked with the disciples, ate meals with them, laughed and cried with them, watched the miraculous ministry of Jesus with them, was trusted by them to faithfully and honestly watch over the money they collected, yet he was a “devil” (John 6:70).

As much as we might hope and wish that everyone who claims to be a Christian truly is a Christian, the fact is that some, perhaps many, are deceived. And we are deceived by them. But Jesus isn’t. Earlier in John’s gospel Jesus said this to some of the Jewish people who are said to have “believed in him”:

“So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, ‘If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free’” (John 8:31-32).

In the final analysis, how can it be known if someone has genuinely been born again and genuinely believed Jesus for the forgiveness of sins? Jesus tells us: ***“If you abide in my word.”*** That is to say, abiding or remaining or persevering or enduring in his word by obeying it and believing it all the way to the end is the evidence that you have truly come to know Christ in a saving way.

(7) The betrayal of Jesus by Judas demonstrates that even the worst of sins can be used by a sovereign God to accomplish his ultimate purpose and to glorify his name.

This we see in John 13:18, 31-32 (also in Acts 2 and 4). In John 13:18 we hear Jesus tell us that what Judas was about to do was actually prophesied in the Old Testament (Ps. 41:9) centuries before it finally came to pass. The Scripture, says Jesus, “will be fulfilled.” The prophecy that the one “who ate my bread” will lift up “his heel against me” (v. 18) was spoken by the word of the Lord.

Betrayal is a sin of immense magnitude, especially when the victim of it is the sinless Son of Man. Yet it served God’s greater purpose of bringing glory and honor to both the Son and the Father. Immediately following the departure of Judas from the upper room to do precisely what Jesus knew from the beginning that he would do, he said this:

“When he [Judas] had gone out, Jesus said, ‘Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once’” (John 13:31-32).

This is quite similar to what we see in the life of Joseph who had been betrayed by his brothers and sold into slavery to Egypt. We read in Genesis 50:20,

“As for you [Joseph’s brothers], you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today” (Gen. 50:20).

Conclusion

There are several practical lessons we learn from this entire scenario.

First, our God is sovereign over all of history, not just the good and beneficial events but even the most devious and seemingly destructive ones. That does not mean he is the moral cause of all events, but he does, in some mysterious fashion, exercise supreme, providential authority over all. He will win! He is in control, not ISIS, not the Taliban, not the government of Russia or the U.S. God rules supreme over all.

Second, such is the nature and power and sovereignty and wisdom of God, that he can take the most wicked of human sins, sins that on the surface might seem as if they have derailed God’s purpose, and use them to bring glory to himself and to bring good to his people. Nothing can overcome God’s determination to glorify his name and to bring you and me into the fullness of his eternal blessings.

Finally, if God foreknew and foreordained the betrayal, arrest, scourging, and crucifixion of his Son, and he did, and caused it all to bring salvation and deliverance and healing to you and me and great glory to himself, then ***we can trust God in the worst of circumstances*** to know that “all things work together for good” for “those who love God” and “are called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28). We may not understand how it happens, but we can, with God’s help, trust that it is so.