

“Betrayed!”

Mark 14:27-31, 43-52, 66-72 ¹

There are many aspects of Jesus’ last night as God in human flesh that could become our focus for a service such as this. Sometimes we focus on the institution of what we call “The Lord’s Supper.” Sometimes we focus on Jesus’ washing the disciples’ feet. Sometimes we focus on Jesus’ New Commandment—“That you love one another.”

But tonight, we’re going to focus on what I’m calling “Betrayal in Three Movements.” We will focus our attention on three scenes in which betrayal took place on this signal and somber evening: in the Upper Room; in the Garden of Gethsemane; and in the High Priest’s Courtyard. Since we’re still wrapping up our journey through the Gospel of Mark, we’ll begin with Mark’s account of each of these scenes.

Scene One. *When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve. While they were reclining at the table eating, he said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me—one who is eating with me.”*

They were saddened, and one by one they said to him, “Surely you don’t mean me?”

“It is one of the Twelve,” he replied, “one who dips bread into the bowl with me. The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born” (Mark 14:17-21).

Only John tells us about Jesus having washed the disciples’ feet before this shocking announcement (John 13:1-17). This means, of course, that Jesus had just washed Judas’ feet as well as the others’. I wonder what that washing was like for Jesus. I wonder what it was like for Judas. And I wonder what it was like for Judas when Jesus revealed His knowledge of the betrayal.

Judas must have had a sickening feeling as his plot was exposed. When John asked Jesus, “Lord, who is it?” Jesus answered, “It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.” Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. So Jesus told him, “What you are about to do, do quickly” (John 13:25-27).

Amazingly, while this quiet conversation was going on, Luke tells us that immediately after Jesus’ announcement of impending betrayal, the disciples got into a dispute about which of them was the greatest (Luke 22:24). This had happened several times before: so on this occasion, too, Jesus told the Twelve that He was about to die, and their response was “Oh, that’s nice. Please pass the butter beans.”

Even in the face of such arrogance and insensitivity, Jesus patiently gave another mini-lecture on sacrifice and service, after which Matthew tells us that Jesus quoted one of the verses

¹ A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, MD on April 18, 2019. Maundy Thursday. Parallel passages are Matthew 26:31-35, 47-56, 69-75; Luke 22:31-34, 47-53, 56-62; John 13:36-38, 18:3-12, 15-18, 25-27.

Sources for this sermon include: Barclay, William, “The Gospel of Mark,” *The Daily Study Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954); Culpeper, Alan, “Mark,” *The Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2007); Garland, David E. “Mark,” *The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996); Lane, William, “The Gospel According to Mark,” *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974); Turlington, Henry, “Mark,” *The Broadman Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman, 1969); Wessell, Walter, “Mark,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Volume 8: Matthew, Mark, Luke*. Digital Version; Williamson, Lamar, Jr., “Mark,” *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Preaching and Teaching*, digital version.

we read earlier from Zechariah: *“I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered. **But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee**”* (Matthew 26:31-32).

It was only after Judas left the room that Jesus began His main teaching at that last supper together before His passion. It was after Judas left that Jesus gave the “new commandment”: *“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another”* (John 13:34-35).

It was after Judas left that Jesus gave the wonderful teachings about the Holy Spirit in John 14-16, and after Judas left that Jesus offered the magnificent “High Priestly Prayer” of John 17. And it was after Judas left that Jesus announced another imminent betrayal: Jesus turned to Simon Peter and said, *“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers”* (Luke 22:31).

Simon boldly protested, *“Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death,”* but Jesus knew what was really going to happen.

Scene Two. As the Passover meal came to a close, Jesus and the Eleven made their way across the Kidron Valley to the Mount of Olives and the Garden of Gethsemane. Not a garden in the modern sense, Gethsemane is an ancient olive grove, and it was a favorite place in which Jesus taught His disciples. The first part of this scene has to do with Jesus’ agonizing prayer, which we’ll consider tomorrow night. Tonight we focus on the conclusion of the scene, Judas’ treacherous betrayal. Here’s how Mark described it:

Returning the third time, [Jesus] said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”

Just as he was speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders.

Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: “The one I kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard.” Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, “Rabbi!” and kissed him. The men seized Jesus and arrested him. Then one of those standing near drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.

“Am I leading a rebellion,” said Jesus, “that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled.” Then everyone deserted him and fled.

A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him, he fled naked, leaving his garment behind (Mark 14:41-52).

The Jewish authorities had long wanted to do away with Jesus, but because the crowds adored Him, they hadn’t found a way to kill Him without causing a riot that would bring down Rome’s fury—fury not because of Jesus, but because of the disorder. What Judas offered was to take them to Jesus at night, under cover of darkness, when there would be no crowds.

The need for a guide was especially acute, not only because of the darkness, but because Gethsemani was a fairly large area and it would be full of pilgrims. Further, most of the arresting party would probably have been unfamiliar with Jesus and would have had a hard time identifying Him in broad daylight. And the saddest thing about betrayal is that it never comes from your enemies, but from those you considered to be your friends.

Jesus had, of course, chosen Judas to be among the Twelve. And for the group to have chosen him to be their treasurer suggests that he had been held in high esteem by his colleagues, even though he later proved to be a thief as well as a traitor (John 12:6).

Judas had now spent three years in constant company with Jesus. He had witnessed nearly every miracle Jesus had performed. He had been a full member of this Band of Brothers, had been sent out with them to perform miraculous things, and had been privy to all of Jesus' private teaching and explanations about the Kingdom.

Many things about Judas seem inexplicable to us. He is a more disturbing figure than Pilate or Caiaphas or any of the Jewish leaders, because he had seen the Light and understood it, but he chose the Darkness anyway.

Nor was any of this a surprise to Jesus. *"There are some of you," He said, "who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. . . . "Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!"* (John 6:64, 70).²

Judas had arranged with the authorities to identify Jesus with the kiss of greeting that was—and is still—customary in that culture. And the authorities had put together an informal posse composed of armed Temple police and at least a few Roman soldiers.

The Romans were always worried about insurrection during the great Jewish festivals, and many additional troops were brought to the city to quell any revolt. Pilate would not likely have refused a request for reinforcements . . . which suggests that Pilate may have been well aware of what was being planned. He just didn't yet realize how heinous it really was.³

Jesus knew the mob was coming, and He alerted His disciples to prepare themselves. John notes that Jesus didn't wait for the mob to approach closely, but rather went out to them Himself, taking the initiative and asking, *"Who is it you want?"* (John 18:4). Somewhere in here, Judas approached Jesus to kiss Him, and Jesus asked him: *"Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?"* (Luke 22:48).

Another key observation that only John recorded is that in response to Jesus' question, "Who is it you want?" the officers stated, "Jesus of Nazareth," and Jesus answered, "I am he." In Greek, this was *εγω εμυ*. While on the one hand this was a common statement similar to "It is I," this could also be understood to be the "I AM" of God's own Name (Exodus 3:14), and John tells us that in response to this, the soldiers *drew back and fell to the ground* (John 18:6). There was no question here about who was in charge.

As the officers stepped forward to arrest Jesus, Peter reached for his sword and struck the servant of the High Priest, cutting off his ear. Jesus reached out and miraculously healed the man's ear, and told Peter, *"Put your sword back in its place. . . . Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions [72,000] angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?"* (Matthew 26:51-54).

Jesus chose not to call in Heaven's Army, but rather allowed Himself to be taken prisoner; and at this disturbing turn of events, all of the disciples quickly found reasons to be somewhere else. One of the great ironies of this moment is that the Temple authorities covered their own rebellion against God by accusing Jesus of fomenting insurrection—the very thing He had just clearly rejected. This would be the charge they would lodge against Him before Pilate, even though they—and he—knew full well that it was a lie.

² See also Hebrews 6:4-6; 1 John 2:18, 22, 4:3; 2 John 1:7.

³ And this may explain his wife's revelatory dream (Matthew 27:19).

Scene Three. Although all eleven of the disciples slunk away into the darkness, leaving Jesus to face arrest alone, two of them came back around. One, whom most scholars believe to have been John, was known to the High Priest, and was able to gain admittance to the High Priest's residence, where the mock trials would take place through the night; and on the strength of this acquaintance, John was able to get Peter admitted to the residential courtyard.

Jerusalem is located in arid country at 2,500 feet above sea level, so the nights become cool quickly. The servants and others were warming themselves by a fire in the courtyard, and Peter got as close as he dared; but things took a nasty turn.

While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came by. When she saw Peter warming himself, she looked closely at him.

"You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus," she said.

But he denied it. "I don't know or understand what you're talking about," he said, and went out into the entryway.

When the servant girl saw him there, she said again to those standing around, "This fellow is one of them."

Again he denied it. After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, "Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean."

He began to call down curses, and he swore to them, "I don't know this man you're talking about."

Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times." And he broke down and wept (Mark 14:66-72).

While love and courage had brought Peter into the courtyard, his very human fear of inheriting a similar fate with Jesus caused him to wilt before the accusations of a servant girl. As the accusations intensified, so did Peter's protestations, even to the point of calling down curses—most likely God's judgment if he were lying—on himself.⁴

Just as Peter uttered his third and most violent denial, a rooster crowed. While this may have been an actual rooster, Scottish commentator William Barclay pointed out that the Romans called the third watch of the night—from midnight to 3 a.m.—the "cock crow." So the sound that marked judgment may have been the cry of a rooster or the cry of the soldiers relieving the watch. In any event, the timing was excruciatingly clear; and Luke noted that at that moment *Jesus turned and looked straight at Peter . . . and Peter remembered (Luke 22:61).*

So What? As we bring this painful rehearsal to a close, we need to ask ourselves what relevance all this has for us as we sit here tonight. I think there are several points to be made.

1. I suspect that we can all identify with Peter. We've all had times when we had a chance to identify with Jesus but remained silent or denied Him because we were afraid of the reactions faithfulness might bring. But like Peter, you and I can repent of our failures, grow through them, and become effective instruments for God's Kingdom. And as the other disciples welcomed and forgave Peter, so we can be gentle with one another when we stumble in the Way of Jesus.

⁴ This was exactly the sort of thing Jesus was talking about when He said to "Let your yes be yes and your no be no" (Matthew 5:37). This is not only using God's Name in vain; but the more vociferously one protests, the more likely it is that one is lying. Some scholars think that Peter was actually calling down curses on Jesus, but that this was so awful that the Gospel writers used euphemisms to describe it.

There can be no doubt that Peter's denials actually happened. This betrayal was so awful that no one would ever have invented it.

2. One of the reasons Peter failed was that he trusted in himself rather than in God. Jesus prayed for strength in the Garden; Peter slept. We never know when we will come under spiritual attack, and we are wise to “*put on the full armor of God so we can take our stand against the devil’s schemes*” (Ephesians 6:11).
3. Throughout these three scenes—as well as throughout His earthly life—Jesus demonstrated complete confidence that God’s purposes would be achieved. Jesus chose to follow what He knew to be the Father’s will, even when the path was more dreadful than anything you or I will ever face. You and I may often find ourselves wondering what God is up to, and why God does or does not seem to be doing what we think is needed; but the Cross of Jesus and His empty Tomb are eternal witness that God’s Love is guiding history to its appointed End.
4. The fact that Jesus did not condone the use of the sword and that He did not call down Heaven’s Army reminds us that God’s Kingdom does not come through violence. As Dr. King so powerfully demonstrated, our defense is not through violence but through the injustice of our suffering. “We will out-love you, and in the end, we will win you,” was the crucial key to success that Dr. King learned from Jesus.
5. Which leads us to the final lesson from the Upper Room: It is our sacrificial love for one another that shows that we have God’s love in our hearts, and it is this divine Love that wins hearts to the Savior. May it be so this Eastertide.