

“Betrayed!” John 18:1-11

Introduction

Of all of the works of evil and treachery that exist in the world today, I think the work of a traitor has to be one of the most painful to endure. A traitor is a person who is trusted. He is a person near you who has professed friendship and loyalty – a person of responsibility and faithfulness, who for whatever, reason turns against the one to whom he has confessed and professed his loyalty and love.

Betrayal hurts, not only because of the pain and harm it usually causes, but because of the breach of trust, the rejection and the hatred that comes from one you thought to be loyal.

Judas was a betrayer. For three years he was a disciple, a follower of Christ. But Judas was a hypocrite. What was on the outside, was far different from what was in his heart. Many speculate that Judas was driven by a desire for an earthly king and that when he realized that Jesus had no intention of ascending a throne in Jerusalem to lead the overthrow of the Romans, that he lost interest.

But unlike those who might turn on you, Jesus knew the heart of Judas. His betrayal was no surprise to Christ. Back in chapter 13 (which was the same evening we are studying here in chapter 18), Jesus released Judas to do his wicked deed.

As we come to the actual event this morning, we are going to find something far different than what one might expect surrounding such a vile act. We might think things would be in chaos - spinning

out of control as Judas descends upon the Garden of Gethsemane with an armed party. But the picture John describes for us is one in which Jesus is in absolute control. The betrayal of Judas was used to give God to further His redemptive plans.

And so this theme is really important for us. How often do things in life not turn out the way we would like? But the truth of this passage is universal. Jesus is in control of all things. Rather than allowing the most bitter disappointments and betrayals of your life harden your heart, you must see the power of Christ to accomplish His purpose through them.

[John 18:1-11]

As he so often does in his gospel, John gives us a different and unique perspective on the life of Christ. Unlike the other gospels, John tells us nothing of the agonizing prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. He doesn't mention the failures of the disciples to stay awake and pray with Him. Consistent with the rest of his gospel, John focuses on the deity of Christ rather than His humanity. And how thankful we can be to see the power of Jesus under the most trying circumstance. Before we look at some of the particular ways Jesus demonstrates His power, let's notice a couple of interesting and important things about the text.

1. Jesus faced the tempter for the last time in a garden. Only John refers to the place as a garden. The other writers call Gethsemane or the Mt. of Olives. Several commentators – Mathew Henry, A.W. Pink and James Boice – all point out that man's problem with sin began with a failure before the serpent in a garden. And now, Jesus as He prayed in agony about His coming death,

overcame for all men the temptations of the flesh as He gave himself up for our sins. The Scriptures make no direct point about this, but the parallels are wonderful to think about as Jesus, the second Adam, undoes the curse of sin.

2. The wisdom and bravery of evil men pails when it comes under that light of God's glory.

Judas' betrayal was intentional. It was well planned. He didn't just happen into the garden with armed men. He didn't turn on Christ compulsively in a moment of weakness. And yet as Judas and the armed host enter the Garden, it is they who are strangely filled with fear. Clearly they were expecting a fight. It reminds us of some kind of posse from an old western movie. But they were scared. And why wouldn't they fear Jesus. He had eluded the arrest of the Pharisees on three previous occasions. He had great influence over the crowds. But most significantly, everyone knew that His miracles of power were not flukes or deceptions. Wouldn't you fear a man who could calm a storm, subdue legions of demons, heals diseases by His word, and even bring dead people back to life? There was much to fear about Jesus Christ!

But what happened in those few moments, while not at all what Judas and the Pharisees expected, was quite consistent with everything Jesus ever taught and did. And for those of us who know Christ, we are not surprised. For in His sovereign control over the events of that night we see the light of the gospel shining forth. And we see the power of Christ. Consider both what Jesus did – and what He didn't do.

1. He did not flee or fight.

Who doesn't flee or fight when their life is on the line? In fact what we find is just the opposite.

Verse 1 tells us that Jesus went forth with his disciples to a place where Judas knew He would be. Jesus went to a place where He knew he'd be found. Hardly the actions of someone trying to escape. Remember, He knew Judas was coming. Back in chapter 13 He commanded Him to get on with it quickly.

Furthermore, the text tells us in verse 4 that Jesus knew *all the things that were coming upon Him*. He knew He was about to be arrested. He knew the unjust trials He was about to endure. He knew that He would be beaten, mocked, and abused. He knew He would die the excruciating death of crucifixion. He knew all these things and still we read *He went forth and said to them, Whom do you seek?*"

This is not a picture of a man ripped from His circumstances and surprised by a sudden turn of events. Again the opposite is true. And what happens next is one of the more amazing and curious things in the gospel accounts. *When He said to them, "I am He", they drew back and fell to the ground.*"

What do you suppose cause that?

- Surprise – not expecting such an easy presentation of their prey. Discovery startled them.
- Instinct and defensiveness and clumsiness – They had their weapons drawn. They were tensely expecting resistance. When Jesus announced himself they drew back in anticipation of a great battle.

While either of these are feasible, there is a better explanation.

- They were overcome by the power of His presence – Notice in verse 5 the thing that

preceded their stumble. Was it not the revelation from Christ of His name? Our English Bibles say *I am He*. In the Greek there is no pronoun *He*. Jesus simply says, *I am*. And this we know is the great name of God first given to Moses. Many suggest that here at this time, Jesus revealed a glimpse of His power and glory to the soldiers in such a way that stripped them bear of all resistance and self will.

And so here is the mighty power of Judaism and Rome combined to take Jesus by force – and they are undone, lying upon the ground, helpless before the majesty of Christ.

And yet what happens next is just as startling. Rather than overpowering them and subduing them, Jesus releases them and gives himself up to them. *Whom do you seek? . . . I told you, I am*. How true were the Words of Jesus in John 10:18? *I lay down My life so that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again*. This is what we see Jesus doing right here.

And the application for us is important. Humble yourself before the mighty hand of God. I Corinthians 10:12 says *Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall*. A day is coming when the voice of Jesus will clearly be heard and we all will face Him. If His presence in the Garden, when His glory was still veiled, was enough to knock down the cohort that had come against Him, how could you think of standing before Him? Every knee will bow in that day. How much better to bow it now in willing and loving faith?

2. He Protected His Own.

Again it is a demonstration of His power and control. Verse 8 – *Jesus answered, “I told you that I am He; so if you seek Me, let these go their way.* It was not a request. It was a command. And this command was obeyed. There is little doubt that the crowd had every intention of arresting the whole lot of them. One of the gospels tells us how the soldiers tried to seize a young lad who was following. A little later in the evening, Peter denied Christ because he feared arrest.

John 13:1 tells us that Jesus loved them (the disciples) to the end. And so, not one of them was to be lost on this night. Not one of them would be arrested.

Here is a great example of the Lord not giving us more to endure than we are able. It is clear that the disciples were not yet ready to stand alone against the enemies of Christ. That time was soon to come. In the Book of Acts we find a boldness and willingness to suffer among the disciples that is clearly not yet in them here in John 18. And Jesus knew that.

They would receive a new power when the Holy Spirit came upon them. But here, now, they were still weak. And Jesus protected them. He kept them from evil.

And that ought to comfort you. Jesus will not give you more than you can endure. Do you believe that? He knows your limits. He will always give you away of escape from your temptations. So you can trust Him to protect you. By a simple word and command here, He restrained the Roman cohort and protected His disciples. His love for you is the same. His eye is upon you and He will deliver you out of all your troubles.

3. He healed His enemy.

John doesn't give us all the details. But we read that Peter, in His zeal, cut off the ear of the high priest's slave. Luke tells us that Jesus touched Malchus' ear and healed Him. There is no end to grace and mercy of Christ. To reach out and touch an enemy here - to do him good and not harm - demonstrates the depth and reality of agape love.

This is another testimony of the power and redemptive purposes of Christ. What an amazing testimony to anyone in the crowd about the offer of salvation in Christ. How could this not have profoundly affected Malchus? And others? We are told nothing of its eternal impact on those present, but certainly we can learn a great deal about our call to love those around us – to have compassion on those who don't know Christ. Certainly it is a call to subdue our anger toward our enemies for the sake of the gospel.

4. He took the cup.

Peter was rebuked for his actions. Peter still did not understand the cross. Peter was still trying to come between Jesus and His atoning work. Remember Matthew 16? *From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You." But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's.*

Peter's still there. He's living out exactly what he said to Jesus then. But Jesus was ready to drink from the cup. He'd just ask the Father to take the cup away if possible. But Jesus had overcome the

temptation to avoid the cross. And now he says *Put the sword into the sheath; the cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?*

This cup, of course, was the cup of God's wrath. It was a bitter cup. But Jesus willingly took it for our sakes. Jesus went to the cross to take away our penalty for sin.

So here is the betrayal. It is real. It is evil. It is filled with hatred. But it was a betrayal with no eternal teeth. Jesus Christ remained in absolute control. And because of what we've seen here today, we can have complete confidence and trust in Him.

- You can trust Him to save you from your sins. The soldiers didn't not arrest Him that night, so much as Jesus gave Himself up to them. Because Jesus was willingly laying down His life for you.
- You can trust Him in your circumstances. Nothing is outside of His control. Life's disappointments – even betrayals you may have experienced – are not without glorious purposes designed by God for your good. So trust God.

Look to Christ today with confident, bold faith. Trust Him with you soul. Trust Him with your life.