

John 13:21-38 One Of You Will Betray Me

Overview: One way to outline John's Gospel is:

John 1—Introduction

John 2-12—Public Jesus

John 13-17—Private Jesus

John 18-21—Glorified Jesus

Introduction:

It was important for John to explain to his readers why it was that Judas, one of Jesus' chosen disciples, one of His inner circle, did not believe in Jesus. On the surface, Judas' betrayal of Jesus seemed to threaten the credibility of who Jesus claimed to be. *Judas was an inside man; had he discovered some ugly truth about Jesus that was so bad, he turned Jesus in? If one of His own disciples did not believe in Jesus, why should you?* John deals with that in this chapter.

Review:

According to 13:2, what role did the devil play in Judas' life? The devil influenced Judas to do evil.

Based on **13:11**, John wanted his readers to know that Jesus was well aware of Judas' evil intentions.

ESV **John 6:70b** Did I not choose you, the Twelve? And yet one of you is a devil.

According to 13:18-19, why did Jesus tell them about His betrayal? He told them about it beforehand to strengthen their faith when it came true, 13:19. Jesus wanted them to know that His betrayal was a fulfillment of Scripture (**Ps 41:9**).

Sovereign Purpose: Jesus purposely chose Judas, knowing he would betray Jesus, to fulfill Scripture.

*****Why did the disciples not restrain Judas when Jesus identified him (13:21-30)?** It

appears that no one except John heard Jesus identify Judas, and even then John heard Jesus instruct Judas to go do something, so John wouldn't have stopped him.

What insight was 13:21 give us into how Jesus was feeling? Even though Jesus knew from the beginning that Judas would betray Him, and that it was necessary to fulfill Scripture, when the actual time for the betrayal, it bothered Jesus.

Jesus knew all along what Judas was going to do, so why was He troubled (13:21)? Jesus was God, but He was human too, as much man as though He were not God, and as much God as though He were not man. Jesus had two natures, human and divine, that were fused but not confused. It troubled Jesus that Judas would betray Him and it troubled Jesus that He would soon have to die a cruel death on a Roman cross.

Synthesis: Since Jesus was troubled, it is no wonder if the disciples were, too. Thus Jesus said:

ESV **John 14:1** Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.

“Testified” (13:21): Jesus did not merely tell the disciples that one of them would betray Him, He “testified” to it. It was not a casual comment—there was no missing what He said.

Based on 13:22, how good was Judas at pretending to be a Christian? Judas was so good at pretending that the other disciples never suspected him as the culprit.

Application: Steven Cole pointed out that Judas serves as one of many warnings in the Bible that apply to religious people. Religious people are often blind to their need for the new birth. They grew up in the church. They know all the religious jargon. They can quote Scripture. They have served in various ministries. But, like Judas, they have never repented of their sins. So if you grew up in the church (as I did) and are familiar with religious matters, the warning is for you: You need the new birth just as much as Judas did.¹

Who was the disciple that Jesus loved who was close to Jesus at the table (13:23)? Without going into the reasons for it, suffice it to say that most commentators think this is John’s way of referring to himself.

Why was John reclining beside the table rather than sitting at it (13:23)? The famous picture that Leonardo da Vinci painted is inaccurate. Although it was customary to sit during a meal, at special meals they did not use sit; rather they reclined at table (13:23).² Each person reclined on a mat alongside a low table, coffee table height, propped up on his left arm, leaving the right arm free to eat with. Each person would have reclined with his head close to the table and with his feet sticking out more away from the table.

Why didn’t Peter just directly ask Jesus who it was, rather than motioning to John for him to ask Jesus (13:24-25)? We are not told the reason, but where ever Peter was positioned, he obviously had a clear view of John.

Seating Arrangement: Let’s see if we can reconstruct where the key figures were.

1) The Table Arrangement: Imagine three rectangular tables arranged into a squared letter “U” shape. Custom indicates that the guests would have been arranged around the outside of the “U” with no one on the inside. The center (12:00 on a clock dial) was presumably left open for ease of serving.

2) The 2:00 position: The most important table of the three was the one on the right as you face a square letter “U” drawn on a board. This is the table at which the host reclined. The host reclined in the next to the last position (about the 2:00 position on an analog clock, lying facing the open end of the U). *Jesus would likely have been in the host’s position.*

¹ Cole, *Lesson 73*.

² Carson, *John*, 473.

3) The 1:00 position: Next to the host, at 1:00 was another guest, at the head of the table. That's where John was. **How do we know?** Our text says that John was "leaning back against Jesus" (13:25) in order to ask Him about Judas. *John was in front of Jesus, in the first spot (1:00).*

4) The 11:00 position: John was sitting at the open end of the U (1:00 position), facing outward, with his back to all the other disciples. **Where must Peter have been sitting that John could see Peter when he motioned to him (13:24)?** *Peter was reclining straight across the "U" from John, at the opposite position (11:00).* Otherwise, John never would have seen Peter motioning!

How did Jesus identify Judas as the betrayer (13:26)?

Based on how Jesus identified Judas, where was Judas at the table in relation to Jesus (13:26)? Judas was close enough to Jesus to take the morsel from Him.

5) The 3:00 position: Mexican restaurant typically bring out chips and salsa for the whole table; ever been with a big crowd and had trouble reaching the salsa? **If you have 12 disciples, laying around the outside of three co-joined tables in a U shape—with no one on the inside—where must Judas have been to be able to eat out of the same bowl as Jesus?** Since John was at the 1:00 position, and Jesus was at 2:00 position, Judas must have been at the 3:00 position, immediately next to Jesus. Jesus' back was to Judas.

Have you ever read in the Bible about the place of honor? For instance, Jesus said that the Pharisees "love the place of honor at banquets" (Mt 23:6). The place of honor was immediately next to the host at the 3:00 position. *This means that Judas was in the place of honor, right next to Jesus.* Peter was in the lowest position.

Application: Put yourself in Judas' sandals. Judas had Jesus' head leaning against his chest during the entire meal. *What tension must Judas have felt, knowing he was about to betray Jesus?* Every time we disobey Jesus we too, in a sense, are betraying Him. Imagine if you could eat a meal with Jesus like this, with you in Judas' spot. There is Jesus' head, right in your chest. *How would you feel about rebelling against Him? How would you feel about disobeying Him?*

What happened to Judas as soon as Jesus gave him the morsel (13:27)? Satan entered into him. This is a true case of demon possession. In a last act of supreme love, Jesus served Judas. Judas accepted the morsel, but not the love. Instead of convicting him of his sin, it hardened him in it.³ That which was the Lord's Supper for the other disciples was sort of a Satanic Lord's Supper for Judas.

Secondary Application: In 1 Corinthians 11b, Paul wrote of believers who were sick and had even died because of sins committed relative to the way they observed the Lord's Supper.

Why did the disciples think Judas immediately got up and left (13:28-29)? Jesus told him to leave. Some thought he was going to buy food, or to give to the poor.

³ Carson, *John*, 475.

Why didn't John do something to stop Judas (13:26-30)? John no doubt figured Jesus was in charge of the situation, and of course heard Jesus tell Judas to go do something.

Why did John bother to inform his readers that it was night when Judas went out (13:30)?

See 13:38. This information becomes significant later on when we learn that Jesus predicted Peter would deny Him three times that night, before a rooster crowed toward morning (13:38).

Humanly speaking, what do you suppose motivated Judas to betray Jesus? Aside from Satan's influence, no human reason was given for Judas' actions. Perhaps Judas had erroneous preconceived notions about the Messiah, and when Jesus didn't jump through his hoop, Judas lost faith in him. Judas also stole from the common purse, so perhaps the love of money motivated him.

Secondary Application: The Passover was an actual meal. Sadly, the last supper has become the lost supper. The early church celebrated the Lord's Supper as a true meal, but in later church history the meal was stripped away, leaving only the bread and wine. We should think long and hard before we change a church practice that was established by Jesus and the Apostles.

*****What final instructions did Jesus leave with the disciples (13:31-35)?** He told them that they were to love one another, 13:34. He went on to say:

ESV **John 15:12** This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

ESV **John 15:17** These things I command you, so that you will love one another.

John, who was right there when Jesus said this, later himself wrote:

ESV **1 John 3:11** . . . this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

ESV **1 John 3:23** . . . this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us.

ESV **1 John 4:7** Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.

ESV **1 John 4:21** . . . this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

"Orthodoxy without principal obedience to this characteristic command of the new covenant is merely so much humbug."⁴

⁴ Carson, *John*, 485.

Perspective: The virgin birth, a cardinal doctrine of the Christian faith, is only mentioned twice in the New Testament. Yet we are commanded over and over to love each other.

In 13:31-32, what did Judas' departure have to do with Jesus' glorification? The key to the connection is the word "now" (13:32). God glorified Himself through Jesus' death and resurrection.

What did it mean for God to glorify Jesus (13:31-32)? For God to glorify Jesus means to cause people see Jesus for who Jesus really is, not merely a godly man who was on a mission from God, but a man who is actually God in human form. Judas' departure to betray Jesus removed the last barrier to the arrival of the "hour".

What did Jesus warn them about in 13:33? He prepared them for the fact that He was going away. They didn't know it then, but we know now that He meant He was about to leave the earth via death. After that, He would leave via His ascension.

Why would Jesus refer to these grown men as "little children" (13:33)? Besides the fact that they sometimes acted like it (!), it was a term of endearment. Jesus was among them as a superior being (God Himself), and all of us are as little children in comparison to God. John the author later referred to his own readers by the same title (such as in **1 John 2:1**).

How little was a little while yet (13:33)? Jesus was arrested that very night and crucified the next morning.

Jesus said that they would "seek" Him after He left (13:33). They would soon face the harsh finality of His death. In what sense would they seek Him after that? Why would you seek someone that you knew was dead? As soon they heard Jesus had resurrected, they rushed to the tomb looking for him. After He appeared to them, they sought Him between His appearances during the next forty days. Finally, after His ascension, they sought His promised return (they didn't know if it would be in their lifetimes or 2,000 years later).

Where was Jesus going that they could not come (13:33)? He was headed into the realm of the dead; they would most assuredly follow later, but not yet. John, our author, likely lived another 50-70 years.

Moses had long ago written to love your neighbor as yourself (Le 19:18). Jesus' said His command to love them was a "new" command (13:34). In what way was it new? Moses said to love your neighbor "as yourself". Jesus said to love "as I have loved you"—a much higher standard. He also set the tone for the key characteristic of the new covenant community—a love for each other such as that which exists between the Father and the Son.

Jesus elaborated more about love in the next chapters, but in general, how had Jesus loved them (13:34)? In this chapter, He loved them by washing their feet. Moreover, He loved them by laying down His life for them:

ESV John 15:13 Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends.

Based on 13:35, what is proof positive that someone is one of Jesus' disciples? Love for one another is a sure indicator.

Thought: Jesus' didn't go so far as to say our love would be an effective tool for evangelism, just that it would prove to people that we really are His disciples (13:35).

Tertullian was a Christian writer who wrote about 100 years after John. Tertullian recorded the marvel of pagans over the love Christians had when persecuted: "See how they love one another . . . how are they ready even to die for one another!"⁵

****** John recorded that it was night when Judas left (13:30b). What in 13:36-38 shows the significance of that information?** It was significant because before the sun came up that morning, Peter will have denied Jesus three times.

Peter asked a question in 13:36 that Jesus didn't directly answer. Why do you think Jesus didn't answer Peter's question? He was probably more than Peter could bear. He was not ready to hear it.

Peter, of course, didn't understand where Jesus was going. (13:33, 36). What did Jesus promise Peter in 13:36 that He never promised the Jews? Jesus promised that Peter would follow Jesus "afterward" (Peter died about 30 years later). It was a timing issue.

Based on 13:37, what did Peter think might have kept him from going with Jesus "now"? Since Peter said he was willing to die for Jesus, he evidently thought it took commitment in face of a dangerous situation to go along with Jesus wherever it was He was going.

Role Reversal: It was Jesus who was supposed to die for Peter, not *vice versa*.

According to Jesus, just how committed was Peter to dying for Jesus (13:18)? Peter would deny that even knew Jesus three times before early morning (which is when roosters crow).

So What?

How was what John wrote in chapter 13 designed to cause an unbelieving Jew to believe in Jesus? John showed how Jesus knew all about Judas' betrayal long before it happened, and how the devil was behind what Judas did. This was to bolster the disciples in their faith (13:19), and of course John recorded it to cause his readers to believe in Jesus, too. John also pointed out to his readers how self-sacrificing service to others and love for others is expected of those who follow Jesus.

What essential lesson did Jesus want the disciples to learn before He left? He wanted them to love each other.

⁵ Carson, *John*, 485.

**** = Ask this question before reading the text. This will engage people's minds and focus their attention.

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