

## **Jesus Identifies His Betrayer** **(John 13:21-30)**

According to Isaiah 53:3, the Messiah would be “a man of sorrows.” Jesus certainly experienced great joy during His earthly ministry, but He also experienced deep sorrow. His betrayal by Judas Iscariot must have constituted one of Jesus’ most sorrowful experiences. Chosen from among many followers to be one of the twelve apostles (Matthew 10:4), Judas was trusted by his fellow apostles so much so that he had been entrusted with the financial responsibilities for the apostolic band (John 13:29). Like the rest of the apostles, Judas would have witnessed Jesus’ miracles, listened to His teachings, and participated in ministry assignments. Unlike the others, Judas never had a true transformation of the heart. Judas seems to have been the primary objector to Mary’s extravagant act of honor on Jesus’ behalf (John 12:4-6). He bargained with the religious leaders in his design to betray Jesus, agreeing to a sum of thirty pieces of silver (Matthew 26:14-16). He would eventually betray Jesus with a kiss, turning Him over to the authorities (Matthew 26:47-50). His remorse and suicide ended a tragic life (Matthew 27:3-5). So tragic was Judas’ life that Jesus said of him, “It would be better for him if he had not been born” (Matthew 26:24). John 13:21-30 records Jesus’ subtle identification of Judas as His betrayer. From this passage we discover that Jesus knows all things. He knows human hearts. He knows the power of evil. He knows our need for redemption. Jesus willingly underwent a painful betrayal in order to win our redemption.

### **Jesus knows even the deepest secrets of our hearts (13:21-22).**

Jesus knew all along that Judas would betray Him. He knows our hearts, even the deepest secrets of our innermost being. We can hide nothing from Him.

***Jesus, deeply troubled, stated that one of the disciples gathered at the meal would betray Him (13:21).***

The hour of Jesus’ death was approaching quickly. Having washed His disciples’ feet, including Judas, Jesus now revealed to His disciples that His inner spirit was troubled. He knew that the path to the cross included betrayal by one of His closest friends (compare Matthew 26:50). He emphasized the significance of this betrayal with the words “truly, truly,” and then told the disciples that one of them would soon betray Him. How painful it must have been for Jesus to know that one in whom He had invested so much love would respond with such hatred and betrayal.

***The disciples, deeply puzzled, looked at each other wondering whom Jesus meant (13:22).***

The disciples couldn’t believe their ears. Who among them would ever dream about betraying their Master? They looked around at each other, puzzled by Jesus’ words. Each of the disciples even wondered if they would be the one to, in some unforeseen way, betray Jesus (Matthew 26:21-22). But Jesus knew who would betray Him. He knows our hearts, even the deepest secrets of our hearts.

**Jesus knows those who are with  
Him and those who are against Him (13:23-26).**

Because Jesus knows our hearts He knows whether or not we've put our faith in Him. While we may fool others, we can never fool the Lord. We dare not play games with God, but must instead put our full faith in Jesus Christ for our salvation.

*Peter signaled to John, who reclined next to Jesus, to ask Jesus to identify the betrayer (13:23-24).*

Because in ancient cultures people reclined around a table during special meals, one person would be close to the side of another. As it turned out, John was closest to Jesus during the Last Supper. John describes himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved (compare John 19:26; 20:2; 21:20). John didn't mean by this description that he held any special position above the other disciples but merely that he had come to understand the deep love of Jesus in his life. Simon Peter took the opportunity to motion to John to encourage him to ask Jesus to identify the betrayer. Like the rest of the disciples, Peter was deeply curious. He may have even had it in mind to try to prevent anyone from betraying Jesus.

*When John asked Jesus to identify the betrayer, Jesus stated that it was the disciple to whom He would give a special piece of bread (13:25-26a).*

John leaned back and whispered to Jesus, asking Him to identify the betrayer. Jesus, probably in hushed tones, indicated that He would reveal the betrayer by handing him a piece of bread dipped into the bowl of food at the table. This act on the part of a dinner host generally represented a special honor to the recipient. Jesus would honor Judas in spite of Judas' hideous plan to dishonor the Lord.

*Jesus dipped a piece of bread into the bowl and gave it to Judas Iscariot (13:26b).*

Jesus then dipped the bread and handed it to Judas Iscariot. John, and possibly Peter, might have recognized in this act Jesus' identification of His betrayer. However, things transpired quickly and even these two disciples must have been incredulous at this identification of Judas. After all, Judas was a trusted member of their group. By contrast, Jesus knows who is with Him and who is against Him. He knows our hearts as well, whether or not we have truly received Him into our lives by faith.

**Jesus knows the power of evil and  
our need for His redeeming love (13:27-30).**

Some have seen in Jesus' act one final attempt to dissuade Judas from his nefarious plan. Judas, however, had already been gripped by Satan and sin (compare Luke 22:3-6). At least in

his mind there was no turning back. Jesus recognized this power of evil over Judas and dismissed him from the meal to carry out his plan.

***When Judas received the bread, Satan entered him (13:27a).***

At the moment Judas took the bread from Jesus' hand, Satan took control of this despicable disciple. Of course, Judas was culpable for his actions. After all, he himself had entered into the agreement to betray Jesus. Now Satan sustained him in fulfilling this plan. Sin is powerful. Evil is overwhelming. Satan is real and wields real influence over human hearts and minds. Only the power of God through Jesus Christ can overcome Satan's influence. Judas rejected Jesus and thereby opened himself to the powerful influence of Satan.

***Jesus instructed Judas to quickly go and do what he had determined to do (13:27b).***

Because Jesus knows the power of evil and He knew the path that Judas had chosen, He instructed Judas to go quickly and enact his evil plan. There was now no turning back. Jesus knew that He must go to the cross and He knew that Judas' betrayal would play a role in this redemptive path. There was no need for delay. Jesus' redemptive hour had come.

***None of the disciples suspected Judas of being the betrayer and they assumed Jesus had sent Judas out on a special errand (13:28-29).***

The rest of the disciples didn't understand why Jesus had dismissed Judas. They didn't suspect that Judas was on his way to betray Jesus. Judas was a trusted disciple. He'd been entrusted with the money bag, and so the disciples assumed Jesus had sent him out to purchase more items for the feast or to give some money to the poor. Judas had put up such a convincing front that none of the disciples suspected him of being capable of betraying Jesus. Some people are masters at hiding their true character behind a cloak of piety!

***Judas left the gathering of disciples, "and it was night" (13:30).***

Judas left the meal immediately after receiving the bread from Jesus. Both knew only too clearly what was about to transpire. At this point John states, "And it was night." The physical darkness certainly paralleled the spiritual darkness of Judas' heart and his imminent act of betrayal. Evil is powerful. Dark hearts are captivated by self and Satan. But Jesus came to redeem us from our sins, to reveal His great love in the face of our rebellion against Him. Jesus willingly underwent a painful betrayal in order to win our redemption. His love for us is immeasurable.