

## Cloak and Dagger

John 13:21-30

### Introduction

A certain patriot officer had begun to establish himself as a military genius. In fact, in only one battle did he taste defeat. He had already become a wealthy man, living in Connecticut, before America declared a war of independence from England.

When he heard about the outbreak of hostilities in Lexington, Massachusetts, he immediately volunteered for service and participated in the successful colonial attack on the British held at Fort Ticonderoga, New York. General George Washington took note of this man's courage and willingness to sacrifice everything for the cause of the colonies.

In February of 1777, Congress created five new major generalships, but he was actually passed over for younger, healthier men. This began a deep bitterness and he would have resigned from the military, had not George Washington pleaded with him to stay on. He agreed and accepted a position to help stem the British advance into upper New York.

He commanded advance battalions at the Battle of Saratoga, in September, fighting brilliantly and decisively, until he was again seriously wounded. This time, his wounds left him crippled; he was finished with fighting.

His bitterness continued to grow into secret resentment, and ultimately, hatred for the American cause. In May, he was promised command of West Point by Washington himself. But, by now, his hatred for the colonies had turned his heart. That month, Benedict Arnold made plans with the British to give West Point over to them.

It would have worked, giving the British a strategic command post, except for one thing. That one fateful night, when the British contact agent was supposed to deliver the final arrangements to a British war ship that had slipped into the Hudson River and was anchored nearby, he was captured on his way, with the details of betrayal in hand. Benedict Arnold soon found out and quickly escaped on that same British war ship, appropriately named, *The Vulture*.

He would live his days in England and, eventually, die, a crippled, old man, who was inactive, ostracized, and unloved. Yet, he was forever famous, for being a traitor.

While no American would ever name his son Benedict, still further, no one, who knows anything about the Bible, would ever want the name Judas. That name, Judas, to this day, still carries the stench of betrayal. While Benedict Arnold betrayed America, Judas betrayed God!

Now, our study of John's gospel has brought us to the final acts in Jesus' ministry. We are less than twenty four hours away from the cross. And it is during that last supper; that upper room experience, that Jesus pulls the mask off Judas and stops his charade.

Let us turn to John, chapter 13. And, I will warn you, I intend to apply and challenge all of us with Judas' story.

Becoming a traitor is not all that far fetched! In fact, betrayal is the logical extension of selfishness.

Let me explain that. If you are determined to come in first place; if you are always number one, then everyone else can only be second place.

Therefore, when you are forced to choose, you will gladly lay down someone else's life for your own.

You may work next to people who would stab you in the back, climb over your desk, lie, cheat, or steal to move up the ladder one more notch. Betrayal comes easy to them.

Traitors are simply people who have to be first.

Now, let us start back at chapter 13, verses 17 through 20.

*If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. I do not speak of all of you; I know the ones I have chosen; but it is that the Scripture may be fulfilled, "He who eats my bread has lifted up his heel against Me."*

*From now on I am telling you before it comes to pass, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am He. Truly, truly I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives him who sent Me.*

## **Judas . . . Why a Disciple?!**

Now, immediately this passage raises some questions about Judas' call.

### **If Judas would betray Jesus . . .**

1. Question number one is, if Judas would betray Jesus, and Jesus knew it, why did Jesus choose Judas?

First, remember that Jesus did indeed choose Judas to be His follower. Judas was joined with eleven other men and then, hundreds of others who also claimed to be Jesus' disciples.

As it related to the twelve, Jesus chose them purposefully and sovereignly. Mark, chapter 3, verse 16, tells us that He called, unto Him, His twelve disciples. It was His choice, His will, His sovereign purpose. He did not travel through Judea asking for résumés. He did not stand up, before a crowd of Jewish men, and ask, "How many of you would like to be apostles? Let me see a show of hands. One, two, three . . . ten, eleven, and twelve. Is twelve all? Okay, you twelve are the ones."

No. Jesus knew who He was calling, what they would do, and why He chose them.

He knew that His disciple Mark would serve Him in Alexandria. Jesus knew that Peter would preach the first sermon in the new dispensation of grace. He

knew that Matthew would plant churches in Ethiopia before being killed by the sword. He knew that John would be exiled to Patmos, where he would write the book of Revelation before being martyred in a boiling cauldron of hot oil.

And Jesus chose Judas because He knew what Judas would do.

### **If Judas was chosen to . . .**

2. That makes me ask question number two, if Judas was chosen to ultimately serve as the fulfiller of prophetic scripture, did Judas have a choice?

The answer is, "Yes!"

He was not a puppet on a string; he was not divinely set up! Jesus Christ gave Judas every chance in the world not to betray Him. He disciplined him for three years; He washed Judas' feet, just like He did Peter's; at this last supper, He gave him the seat of honor; in the garden, He called him friend. For three and a half years, Jesus showed no partiality against Judas, so much so, that no disciple was able to detect any animosity between them.

What Judas would do was as much a prophetic fulfillment as what Peter would preach. But Peter, from the human side, had to choose to preach; John had to choose to write; Judas had to choose to betray.

### **What was it that . . .**

3. Question number three is, what was it that attracted Judas to Jesus?

To put it simply, it was the potential for the overthrow of Rome and a position of power.

You need to understand that the scriptures make it very clear that Judas was not a believer. He was a classic hypocrite, a false disciple who pursued Christ for selfish reasons.

Turn back to John, chapter 6, verse 64, where Jesus is saying,

*"But there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him.*

Jesus knew all along! To everyone else though, Judas looked, talked, and acted like a disciple. He, in

fact, preached, healed, and cast out demons along with the other eleven disciples.

And that is happening today! There are people who say they are Christians, who act like they are Christians, and who talk it, but the Lord knows that, in their heart, they are hypocrites and are following Him only for what He will give them. As soon as God does not give them the life they want, they, like Judas, will walk away from Him, revealing they had never accepted Him.

What I find interesting is that, when Jesus announced the betrayer was in that room, not one person looked at Judas and said, “Aha! I knew it was you! I could tell all along that you were a fake!”

*No!* They all said, “Lord is it me?”

Look at chapter 13, verses 21 and 22.

***When Jesus had said this, He became troubled in spirit, and testified, and said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, that one of you will betray Me.” The disciples began looking at one another, at a loss to know of which one He was speaking.***

No one said, “I knew it was Judas!”

The truth is, they so respected Judas that they put him in charge of the common money bag.

You need to remember, Judas stuck it out for three and a half years. He was not the kind of person who slips into church and sits on the back row – no offense to those who do. Judas would have volunteered to teach or preach; we would have selected him as an excellent candidate for deacon or elder. On the outside, he was a committed disciple who was willing to go through the ridicule and deprivation of being one of Jesus’ disciples, but, on the inside, he was a traitor in the making.

## **Judas . . . Why a Betrayer?!**

*How could that be?!* Why would he become a betrayer? How could Judas turn against Jesus?

I believe there are three reasons.

### **His attraction to money**

1. The first reason is his attraction to money. Turn back to chapter 12, verses 4 through 6.

***But Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples, who was intending to betray him, said, “Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred***

***denarii, and given to poor people?” Now he said this, not because he was concerned about the poor, but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box, he used to pilfer what was put into it.***

The Greek word John uses to describe him is the word “kleptomaniac”. Judas had been secretly stealing from the disciples’ community pot for three years.

How crass! How vile! He was interested in Christianity only for how Christianity could profit him financially. Does that sound familiar?

### **His affection for Jerusalem**

2. But there has to be more to it than money. Let me suggest that another reason is his affection for Jerusalem.

It is clear that Judas, like any Jewish patriot, desired the kingdom of God. They were looking, at that very time, for the Messiah. Here is Jesus, with divine power, claiming to be God incarnate. So, Judas might be thinking, “I’ll throw my lot in with Him and bring in the kingdom!”

But, something strange happens. Instead of rushing for the Roman emperor’s throne, at the height of his popularity, when all of the thousands are shouting, “Hosanna!” Jesus starts talking about dying! “Die???!?”

Judas knew then and there that Jesus was not the Messiah he had been waiting for! And, since Judas was an opportunist, looking for his own self-advancement, he recognized that he had better reestablish ties with the leaders of Jerusalem. In that way, when Jesus did die, he would not die along with him. Instead, “Let the other eleven fools die with Him.”

### **His avid hatred for Rome**

3. Reason number three is his avid hatred for Rome.

There is an interesting thought about Judas. In chapter 12, verse 4, he is referred to as Judas Iscariot. The word “Iscariot” may be a Greek form of the Hebrew “ish kerioth,” or “man of Kerioth”. If Judas was from Kerioth, he would have been the only disciple who was not a Galilean. However, the word

“Iscariot” could have been a designation that reflected on Judas’ past association.

It is possible that “Iscariot” is related to the Latin term “sicarius,” which was used as the designation of a member of the radical Zealot party. Members of that party violently opposed Roman rule in Palestine. They were called “Sicarii,” in honor of the “sica,” a dagger that they concealed in their robes and used. In the book of Acts, they are called “Assassins”.

Josephus, a Jewish historian who lived during the time Paul was defending himself in Rome, wrote this about the Sicarii,

*There sprang up in Jerusalem a gang of robbers called Sicarii, who slew men in the daytime when they mingled with the populace at the festivals and hiding short daggers in their garments, stabbed with them those that were their enemies. The Sicarii were implacable in their hatred to Rome and those Jews who were suspected of leaning toward Rome.*

Judas fits the profile. He was a thief who would slit the throat of a Gentile, a Roman, or a Jew in his passion to overthrow Rome. And, attached to his name, and the name of his father, Simon, was this badge of honor; “Judas Sicarii,” or “Judas of the Dagger”.

His attraction, his affection, his emotion – these things have made many a person a traitor.

Now go back to verse 21.

*When Jesus had said this, He became troubled in spirit, and testified, and said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, that one of you will betray Me.”*

Skip to verses 23 through 25.

*There was reclining on [or at] Jesus’ breast one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved.*

This is John, the author.

*Simon Peter therefore gestured to him, and said to him, “Tell us who it is of whom He is speaking.” He leaning back thus on Jesus’ breast, said to Him, “Lord, who is it?”*

In those days, they ate on the floor propped on the elbow of one arm while scooping the food with the other. John is, evidently, to Jesus’ right and Judas to Jesus’ left.

Peter cannot stand the suspense. And, besides, his blood is boiling at the thought of a betrayer in this room! “John, find out who he is.”

I believe that, if Jesus had told in clear terms, Judas would not have gotten out of that room alive. We know that Peter needed the sword practice.

Continue to verse 26.

*Jesus therefore answered, “That is the one for whom I shall dip the morsel and give it to him.” So when He had dipped the morsel, He took and gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot.*

You need to know that this statement was made to John alone. In fact, John did not really connect it all until later.

Now freeze the picture for just a moment. The host of the Passover supper would give some matzoth bread with bitter herbs to be received, first, by the guest of honor. Who was Jesus’ guest of honor? Judas. I believe that this was one more invitation for Judas to repent and confess.

I wonder at Judas’ pulse rate – his pounding heart, his guilty conscience. According to Luke’s gospel, Judas had already met with the leaders and agreed on the price of betrayal, but there was yet to be the final arrangements. There is still time to stop, before he seals his doom.

But Judas took the bread and he hardened his heart against this loving invitation. One wonders if Judas could look into Jesus’ eyes.

Now that Judas has made his choice, verses 27 through 30 tell us what happens then.

*And after the morsel, Satan then entered into him. Jesus therefore said to him, “What you do, do quickly.” Now no one of those reclining at the table knew for what purpose He had said this to him. For some were supposing, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus was saying to him, “Buy the things we have need of for the feast”; or else, that he should give something to the poor. And so after receiving the morsel he went out immediately; and it was night.*

For Judas, the dawn never came.

## Application

By way of application, I want to say, basically the same thing in three different ways.

### **It is possible to be close to the truth without . . .**

1. It is possible to be close to the truth without accepting the truth.

### **It is possible to associate with Christ without . . .**

2. It is possible to associate with Christ without accepting Christ.

To anyone who has simply come to church for all the wrong reasons – to look respectable to the family; to meet business contacts; to find a position of power – it is possible to associate with the church without being a child of God.

### **It is possible to hear the truth without . . .**

3. It is possible to personally hear the truth without ever personally applying the truth.

What a thrill, recently, to sit in the home of a medical doctor, and his wife, and to share with them the gospel of Jesus Christ. After an hour or so, this man said something like, “I understand now what you’ve meant when you referred to Jesus as a personal Savior. I’ve always believed that Jesus was the Savior of the world, but I never have asked him to be mine.”

What a thrill it was to hold hands around that kitchen table and hear them both pray to personally receive, as their own Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

## **Believer’s Warning**

To the believer, there is a warning in this passage also.

### **It is possible to rebel against God’s plans, when . . .**

1. It is possible to rebel against God’s plans, when they violate our plans.

Now, Judas was never a believer. As soon as he was sure Jesus was not going to fulfill his own life-long ambition, he betrayed Jesus.

But what about Peter, Matthew, Andrew . . . and the other apostles? They were all committed to following Christ, but not to the extent of death; not now; not to wooden crosses!

They were all disappointed by God! Did you hear that?! Jesus had let them all down! And they all,

except for John, scattered for the hills in disillusioned fear. “What in the world, God, are you doing?!”

Is God disappointing you? Are His plans surprising you, filling you with disappointment, or even anger? Is God just not cooperating?!

I think of Dr. R. T. Kendall, a pastor from England, who coined the phrase, “The betrayal barrier”. In his opinion, one hundred percent of believers eventually go through a period when God seems to let them down.

It may occur shortly after becoming a Christian – the new convert loses his job, or his child becomes ill, or business reverses occur. Or, it may occur after serving Him faithfully for many years – then life suddenly starts to unravel. It makes no sense. It seems so unfair.

Philip Yancey tells the story of family friends, named the Woodsons, in his book, *Disappointment with God*. The Woodsons had two children, Peggie and Joey, both born with cystic fibrosis. Peggie and Joey stayed skinny, no matter how much food they ate. They coughed constantly and labored to breathe. Twice a day, Meg had to pound on their chests to clear out mucus. They spent several weeks, each year, in a local hospital, and both grew up knowing they would probably die before reaching adulthood.

Joey, a bright, happy, all-American boy, died at the age of twelve. Peggie defied the odds by living much longer.

Yancy writes that he joined Meg in desperate prayers for Peggie. Peggie survived several health crises in high school and went away to college. She seemed to grow stronger, not weaker, and their hopes rose that she would find healing after all. But there was no miracle, Peggie died at the age of twenty-three.

One night, sometime later, Philip Yancey came across the letter Meg had written to him after Peggie’s death. Here is what the letter said,

*I find myself wanting to tell you something of how Peggie died. I don’t know why except that I need to talk about it and I have run out of people to tell.*

*The last time Peggie was in the hospital and things were not going well, she looked around at all the paraphernalia of death, to which she was attached, and said, “Hey, Mom, remember that quotation?” A quotation*

from William Barclay that her minister had used. “Endurance is not just the ability to bear a hard thing, but to turn it into glory.”

*Peggie’s commitment to Christ was evident, even in the end. Once, the president of her college came to see her and asked if there was anything specific he could pray for. She was too weak to talk, but nodded to me to explain the Barclay quote and ask him to pray that her hard time would be turned into glory.*

*I was sitting beside her bed a few days before her death, when suddenly she began screaming. I will never forget those shrill, piercing screams. Nurses raced into the room from every direction and surrounded her with their love.*

*Eventually, with their words and their touches, they soothed her (though as time went on and the screaming continued, they could not comfort her).*

*Nurses can only stay on that floor so long – because they can’t do more to help – because God, who could have helped, looked down on a young woman devoted to Him, quite willing to die for Him to give Him glory, and it seemed He decided to sit on his hands and let her death top the horror charts.*

*If I’ve been telling you all this in an effort to come to some kind of resolution to the problem of Peggie’s and my pain, perhaps I’ve been brought once again to the only thing that helps me experience God’s love: His words to me saying, “I’m here, Meg.” But, again I wonder, how could He be in a situation like that and seemingly do nothing?*

*As I think of it, I’ve never expressed all this to anyone before, for fear of disturbing someone’s faith. Thanks for listening. Most people have no idea how much that helps.*

One of the greatest frustrations is knowing that God created the entire universe, by simply speaking it into existence, and He has all power and all understanding. He could rescue; He could restore; He could heal; He could cause conception; He could open that job’s door. And He could do that with one stroke of His finger. Why won’t He do it? Is He, like Mrs. Woodson wrote, “sitting on His divine hands?”

At that point, ladies and gentlemen, you have two options. One option is to listen to the voice of the

accuser, and that little part of all of us that resembles self-centered Judas, and say, “God, You have betrayed my expectations; You have discomforted my life; You have not given me my demands, so I will take matters into my own hands. Thank you for nothing.”

Or, you can say, “Lord, I do not understand what You’re doing in my life, but I’m willing to accept whatever You do, even if You choose never to explain why.”

We all have a little bit of Thomas, a little bit of Peter, and even a little bit of Judas inside us. We can all play a little cloak and dagger, but, by God’s grace, we will not with Him – even when we do not understand Him.

By the way, the stunning, amazing thing about this passage is not Judas’ hatred for Rome, or his hardness toward Jesus, or the lack of discernment among the disciples; the most amazing thing is the compassion and love of Jesus.

Perhaps you have been the one betrayed. Maybe you have come to the conclusion that you deserve a little revenge; a little bitterness. Well, Jesus knew what Judas would do, and yet He called him “friend,” He washed his feet, and He honored him with the potential of His friendship.

Do as Philippians, chapter 2, verses 5 and 8b, tell us,

***Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus . . . He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.***

Pray, “Lord Jesus, help us to be willing to die to selfish expectations; oh, help us to put to death the wretched desire to be first.”

My friend, the Lord is giving you another opportunity right now to say, “Lord, I’m fooling everyone with my spiritual hypocrisy – my wife, my children, my parents. Forgive me. I set my selfishness and manipulation aside and admit to You, for the first time, that I am a sinner who needs to be saved. I want to accept the truth!”

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