

The Upper Room (John 13)

John 13.18-30: The Prospect of the Betrayal (The Sop)

v.18: Given the presence of Judas Iscariot in the upper room, the Lord Jesus could not speak of *all* the disciples as 'clean' (see v.11), or apply the lessons of the feet washing to them *all* (vv.12-17). He had chosen each one of them to be apostles; His closest companions and followers, and yet there was a 'but', a 'sad or negative' implication to that choice – one of them would betray Him.

The word 'betray' in the Greek really means to 'deliver up'. Perhaps the word 'betray' should not be used of the Lord Jesus as one who is betrayed is unaware of it. He knew all along who would betray Him (cf. John 6.64, 70-71; 12.4). **John 6.70-71:** *Jesus answered them, Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil? He spake of Judas Iscariot the son of Simon: for he it was that should betray him, being one of the twelve.*



It was not only the Lord Jesus, but the Scripture which had foretold of Judas' betrayal. **John 13.18:** *He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me.* This is a reference to Psalm 41.9 where David speaks of Ahithophel, his one-time counsellor and trusted friend who had now turned against him and joined Absalom's rebellion (2 Samuel 15-17). It is interesting to note that Ahithophel committed suicide by hanging himself, as did Judas (2 Samuel 17.23; Matthew 27.5). Judas of course was responsible for his own decisions, but those decisions fulfilled the word of God. To eat at one's table was regarded as a symbol of acceptance, friendship and close companionship. Judas had eaten 'my bread' (cf. Psalm 41.9). The Lord Jesus was the host, who in His love and grace had invited Judas as His personal guest to share His table. Yet, Judas had *lifted up his heel* against the Lord. This seems to have the thought of raising the foot in preparation to kick. The heel was lifted in anticipation, but the blow was not yet struck (Luke 22.47-48). It is also a mark of **contempt** to show the bottom of one's foot in the Near East, similar in thought to shaking the dust off the feet (cf. Luke 9.5). After the honour of intimacy and companionship with Christ, after all he had heard and seen, Judas saw no beauty in Him. He listened and watched unmoved. What about us?

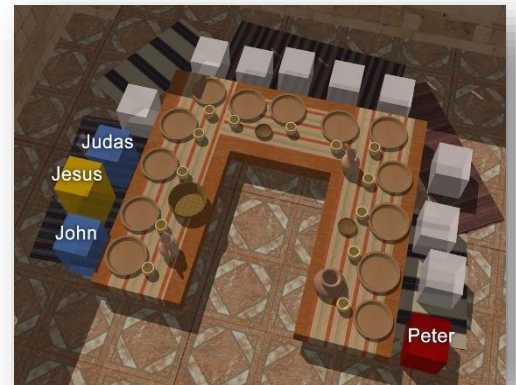
v.19: The fact that the Lord Jesus, and indeed the Scriptures, had foretold this event would bring great comfort and encouragement to the disciples. He was not caught by surprise and this was no mistake. He had told them of the betrayal before the event that when it came to pass, they would believe He was the mighty **I Am**. This title refers to God in relation to eternity. **Leckie:** *When God speaks of Himself in relation to time and space, He says 'He that was (past), and is (present) and is to come (future)', Revelation 1.8. When God speaks of Himself in relation to eternity, He says 'I am'. He knows no past, or future, but one eternal now. Absolute, immutable and self-existing.* Note. Fulfilled prophecy is one of the greatest proofs of the deity of Christ and the inspiration of the Scriptures (Isaiah 42.9; 46.9-10; 48.3). Note also, 'When it has come to pass' has immediate reference to the prophecy concerning Judas (v.18), but the fulfilling of the words of the Lord Jesus was something that would characterize the immediate time 'from henceforth' (cf. Matthew 26.54, 56; 27.9, 35; John 17.12; 18.9, 32; 19.24, 28, 36).

v.20: The Lord Jesus now adds a further word of encouragement. The disciples should remember that they were being sent on a divine mission (cf. 17.18; 20.21) and the defection of Judas in no way invalidated it. The collapse of any one individual never closes the door of testimony! In fact, these disciples would be so closely identified with the Lord Jesus, that to receive (or welcome) the disciples was to receive Him and the Father. If an apostle or his teaching is rejected, then deity is rejected (1 John 2.23; 1 Corinthians 14.37). They were ambassadors, representing Christ.

v.21: The Lord Jesus now *narrows* His earlier statement (v.18) – it was one of the twelve who would betray Him. This thought caused the Lord Jesus to be 'troubled' or 'deeply moved' in spirit (see also 11.33; 12.27). In Acts 17.16, Paul's spirit was greatly distressed when he saw Athens wholly given to idolatry. There may be a similar thought here in the sense that the Lord Jesus was spiritually affected by the presence of evil in Judas – He keenly felt all that was contrary to God. Psalm 55.11-14 seems to verbalise the feelings of the Lord Jesus at this point. Perhaps He was also deeply troubled by the enormity of Judas' crime and the awful doom that lay before him as a result.

v.22: This statement of the Lord Jesus caused the disciples to look on one another with ‘bewilderment’ and ‘perplexity’. Judas had obviously been amongst them as an ‘angel of light’ and there was nothing about him which had aroused their suspicion. Matthew (26.21-25), Mark (14.18-21) and Luke (22.21-23) tell us that the disciples began to discuss amongst themselves who the traitor might be, with each of the disciples asking, ‘Lord, is it I?’, even Judas, who said ‘Master, is it I?’ (Matthew 26.25). Judas could not call Him Lord (cf. 1 Corinthians 12.3). What a lesson there is for us to learn here. The disciples trusted the word of the Lord Jesus over and above their own hearts!

vv.23-24: The Lord and His disciples would have been reclining on cushions around a table (triclinium). **Beasley-Murray:** *The participants (in the meal) reclined on their left sides, supporting themselves with their left arm, leaving the right arm free; Jesus as the host would have been slightly forward of the rest; if the Beloved Disciple, who will have been on his right, leaned back to speak to Jesus he would literally have had his head at his breast.* So John is literally ‘leaning in’ the bosom of the Lord Jesus. This is a place of affection and communion – spiritually it suggests the **sweetness of Divine love**. It is the *saint* of the bosom who writes of the *Son of the bosom* (John 1.18)! It is being in the bosom of the Lord Jesus which holds the secret of divine communication (v.24). The Lord never shouts His mind to those who are living at a distance; He whispers His mind to those who are leaning in His bosom. There is no short-cut to receiving divine revelation. One must live near to Him. John refers to himself as the disciple ‘whom Jesus loved’ (x5, 13.23; 19.26; 20.2; 21.7, 20). It is not that the Lord loved John any more than the other disciples, but demonstrates John’s greater *appreciation* of Divine grace and love. Peter beckoned to John to ask who would betray the Lord. This was probably because he was too far away to ask quietly and personally. However, there is the deeper spiritual lesson of receiving spiritual communication (see above). John was occupying a place of nearness that the others were not. Perhaps there was a sense of *distance* already beginning to manifest in Peter’s soul (see Matthew 26.58). Let us always enjoy the privilege of direct access to the throne of grace.



v.25: John has now changed his posture. Instead of ‘leaning in’, he is now ‘lying on’ His breast. John has leant back to ask Peter’s question, his head now literally resting on Jesus’ breast. This position reminds us of the **security of Divine love**, especially precious in times of bewilderment and uncertainty. It is likely that John *whispered* the question and was therefore not heard by the other disciples. This would explain their continuing ignorance (vv.28-29).

v.26: To identify the traitor (at least to John and possibly Peter), the Lord Jesus gives ‘the sop’ to Judas. The sop (‘morsel’ or ‘fragment’, possibly a piece of bread dipped in sauce or, as *Edersheim*, a piece of lamb, unleavened bread and bitter herbs wrapped together) was usually specially prepared by the head of the household and given to a favoured guest or special friend. The Lord had appealed to Judas’ conscience (v.21), now He appeals to his heart. There was no response. His conscience was seared and his heart hardened. **Gooding:** *Judas, you have taken the bread of my friendship on many occasions, and in spite of it have treacherously lifted up your heel to kick me. Now you are about to betray me, Judas, I offer you once more the bread of my friendship. Will you not accept it?* The giving of the sop here was not the same sign as that in *Matthew 26.23: He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me*. This simply denoted that one of the twelve sharing food and fellowship with Him at the meal would be the traitor.

vv.27-30: Judas had rejected the last loving advances of the Lord Jesus (contrast Peter, Luke 22.61-62). Thus, after putting the thought in Judas’ heart (v.2), Satan now takes possession of his willing vessel. God gave him up (Romans 1.24, 26). The Lord then commanded (imperative) Judas to go about his business ‘quickly’ or ‘without delay’ – he was lost and could not be recovered, thus the Lord Jesus dismisses him from His presence. The disciples were still completely ignorant. Some thought the Lord was telling Judas (the treasurer of the group, John 12.6) to go and buy provisions for the Feast of Unleavened Bread or give something to the poor, a custom which was practiced at Passover. But Judas had not gone to *buy* or *give*, rather to *sell* and *receive*. He would sell the Son of God for the price of a slave that had been gored by an ox (Exodus 21.32; cf. Zechariah 11.13). Judas was obedient to the Lord and went immediately out – ‘and it was night’. It was literally night time, but John is no doubt using imagery. It was now that the hour of the ‘power of darkness’ had begun (Luke 22.53). Judas had rejected the Light of the World and so he passed out into a night of spiritual darkness for which no morning will ever dawn.