

## Jesus betrayed by Judas. Bethesda meditation. 16 September 2012.

As far as I know, the Old Testament speaks of only two ordinary mortals whose words and actions are recorded in the New Testament. Last Lord's day evening, the speaker spoke about the one – John the Baptist. I want us to think for a few moments this morning of the other – Judas Iscariot. Peter spoke of John under the title of 'the Prisoner'. There is no doubt about the title we would each give to Judas – what else but 'the Betrayer'.

The New Testament explicitly tells us that the contribution made by both of these men resulted in the fulfilment of scripture.<sup>1</sup>

As you know, John played a key role in preparing the way for our Lord's public ministry, and Judas played a key role in bringing it to a close – by helping orchestrate His death. John's own ministry fulfilled that which had been foretold in the Prophets – by Isaiah and Malachi; Judas's dark deed and its sequel fulfilled that which had been foretold in the Psalms – by David.<sup>2</sup>

I note in passing that the name 'Judas' is the Greek form of the Hebrew 'Judah', signifying 'one who is to be praised'.<sup>3</sup> And I find it ironic that, as a result of his treacherous action, the name which properly means 'one who is praiseworthy' should have become more or less synonymous with that which is despicable and shameful.

In the very well-known passage in the latter part of 1 Corinthians 11, the apostle Paul points out that it was 'in the night in which He was betrayed' that 'the Lord Jesus ... took bread ... and also the cup'.<sup>4</sup>

And, yes, as the apostle John noted in his gospel, 'it was night' when Judas left the Upper Room<sup>5</sup> ... speeding on his way to be, in Peter's words in Acts 1, 'guide to those who arrested Jesus'.<sup>6</sup> The Pascal Moon would have been shining brightly at the time, but there was no moon to light the spiritual darkness into which Judas 'went out'!

But, before we are told that he left the Upper Room, our attention is drawn to three features of Judas.

First, we are told something about his **heart**.

'During supper', we read, 'the devil having already put it into the **heart** of Judas Iscariot ... to betray Him, Jesus rose from supper ... and began to wash the disciples' feet'. This statement of John is sandwiched between two other passages which record that 'Satan entered into Judas'. We are told that, previously, when 'the feast of unleavened bread, which is called the Passover, drew nigh, and the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might kill' the Lord Jesus, then 'Satan entered into Judas ... he went away and conferred with the chief priests and captains as to how he might betray Him to them'.<sup>7</sup> And then we are told that, following our Lord's washing the feet of the disciples, and immediately before Judas left the Upper Room, 'after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him'.<sup>8</sup>

'Morsel', did I say. In all likelihood, this was a piece – a fragment – of unleavened bread that Jesus had dipped into a bowl containing herbs and a fruit purée.

But this brings me to the second feature of Judas which is mentioned. Not now his heart but his **hand**. For at an earlier point during the meal, Jesus had solemnly declared, 'Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me'. And when the disciples each responded, 'Is it I, Lord?', He answered, 'He who dips his **hand** in the dish with me will betray me'.<sup>9</sup> 'The Son of man goes as it is written of Him', Jesus added, 'but woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born'.<sup>10</sup>

I can imagine no more sober word of warning. It was our Lord's final gracious appeal to Judas to renounce his treacherous intention ... to pull back from the precipice, even at this late hour. But, alas for Judas, it proved of no avail.

And then, thirdly, we read – not now of his heart or his hand, but of his **heel**. Speaking metaphorically, Jesus had told His disciples, 'he who is bathed does not need to wash, except his feet, but is wholly (is completely) clean', but had then added, 'but not every one of you'. 'He knew who was to betray Him', we are told, 'therefore He said, Not all of you are clean'<sup>11</sup> ... I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But that the scripture may be fulfilled, "he who eats bread with me has lifted up his **heel** against me"<sup>12</sup>.

Our Lord was quoting – as I indicated earlier – from one of David's psalms; Psalm 41 to be precise.<sup>13</sup> The historical background to that psalm was almost certainly that of Absalom's conspiracy and rebellion against King David. And the man guilty of figuratively 'lifting up his heel' – in order to crush David – was none other than Ahithophel, David's former trusted friend and counsellor. For when, as we read, 'Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel'<sup>14</sup> and attempted to usurp David's throne, we read also that 'he sent for Ahithophel ... David's counsellor',<sup>15</sup> who readily threw in his lot with the conspiracy.<sup>16</sup> And the loss of Ahithophel to Absalom's side was

no joke for David. For it was said of Ahithophel that his counsel 'was as if a man had enquired at the oracle of God'.<sup>17</sup>

And there is little doubt that Ahithophel was the man of whom David had written, 'My own familiar friend (literally, 'the man of my peace or well-being'), in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me'. And by quoting from David's psalm, David's greater Son was to some extent making David's lament over Ahithophel His own over Judas – both of whom (Ahithophel and Judas), I note, later took their own lives by hanging themselves.

But there were at least two important differences between David's lament over Ahithophel and our Lord's words concerning Judas. Firstly, the Saviour omitted David's reference to his 'own familiar friend'. For our Lord was never insincere. And when He later addressed Judas in the Garden of Gethsemane with the words (in the English Bible), 'Friend, why have you come?', or as some translate it, 'Friend, do what you came to do', the Lord was careful to use a very different word to that which He had used when speaking of Lazarus of Bethany, 'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep'. The word which He used when speaking to Judas signifies rather 'companion', 'associate'.<sup>18</sup> And so, I suggest, having Judas in mind, Jesus deliberately omits David's expression, 'My own familiar friend'.

But there is a second important difference between David's lament over Ahithophel and our Lord's words about Judas. Because, apart from anything else, we can go some way to explain Ahithophel's turning against David, even if we cannot justify it.

For Bathsheba, whom David had earlier grievously wronged and defiled, was Ahithophel's granddaughter, and Uriah, whose death David had cruelly engineered, had been his grandson by marriage.<sup>19</sup> But our Lord had done absolutely nothing to warrant Judas's treacherous deed.

And we know that the Saviour felt Judas's betrayal most keenly, far more than David ever did that of Ahithophel. We have only to think of how He (our Lord) had spoken of His passion to His disciples some time before ... 'Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the scribes ...'.<sup>20</sup> Or of His words to them on an earlier occasion, 'Did I not choose you, the Twelve? And *one of you* is a devil' - '*one of you* has a devilish nature'.<sup>21</sup> Or, again, when we read that 'troubled in spirit', 'He testified, '*...one of you will betray me*'.<sup>22</sup>

But, as has often been pointed out, the word translated 'betray' in the gospel narratives in connection with Judas<sup>23</sup> is the same as that rendered there 'deliver up' in connection with both the chief priests<sup>24</sup> and Pontius Pilate<sup>25</sup> ... each of whom played a key part in our Lord's passion.

Clearly, Judas delivered Him up, in part at least, out of greed ... the chief priests out of envy ... and Pilate out of weakness. But, as we all know well, ultimately, and in the final analysis, it was God who 'spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all' – and *He* did it out of *love*.

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## Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Matt. 3. 3; 11. 10; Mark 1. 2; John 13. 18; Acts 1. 16, 20.
- <sup>2</sup> Psa.41. 9; 69. 25; 109. 8; see John 13. 18; Acts 1. 20.
- <sup>3</sup> See Gen. 49. 8.
- <sup>4</sup> 1 Cor. 11. 23-25.
- <sup>5</sup> John 13. 30.
- <sup>6</sup> Acts 1. 16.
- <sup>7</sup> Luke 22. 3-4.
- <sup>8</sup> John 13. 27.
- <sup>9</sup> Matt. 26. 20-21.
- <sup>10</sup> Matt. 26. 24.
- <sup>11</sup> John 13. 10-11.
- <sup>12</sup> John 13. 18.
- <sup>13</sup> Psa. 41. 9.
- <sup>14</sup> 2 Sam. 15. 6.
- <sup>15</sup> 2 Sam. 15. 12.
- <sup>16</sup> 2 Sam. 15. 31.
- <sup>17</sup> 2 Sam. 16. 23.
- <sup>18</sup> See W. E. Vline, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, article 'FRIEND. 2. *hetairos*'.
- <sup>19</sup> 2 Sam. 11. 3; 23. 34 (15. 12).
- <sup>20</sup> Matt. 20. 18.
- <sup>21</sup> John 6. 70-71.
- <sup>22</sup> John 13. 21.
- <sup>23</sup> For example, Matt. 26. 15.
- <sup>24</sup> Matt. 27. 2.
- <sup>25</sup> Matt. 27. 26.