

The End and the Beginning According to John

Judas, Peter and the Other

John 18.1-11, 15-18, 25-27

March 14, 2021

When Jesus had spoken these words, He went forth with His disciples over the ravine of the Kidron, where there was a garden, in which He entered with His disciples. ² Now Judas also, who was betraying Him, knew the place, for Jesus had often met there with His disciples. ³ Judas then, having received the Roman cohort and officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. ⁴ So Jesus, knowing all the things that were coming upon Him, went forth and said to them, "Whom do you seek?" ⁵ They answered Him, "Jesus the Nazarene." He said to them, "I am He." And Judas also, who was betraying Him, was standing with them. ⁶ So when He said to them, "I am He," they drew back and fell to the ground. ⁷ Therefore He again asked them, "Whom do you seek?" And they said, "Jesus the Nazarene." ⁸ Jesus answered, "I told you that I am He; so if you seek Me, let these go their way," ⁹ to fulfill the word which He spoke, "Of those whom You have given Me I lost not one." ¹⁰ Simon Peter then, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear; and the slave's name was Malchus. ¹¹ So Jesus said to Peter, "Put the sword into the sheath; the cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?"

¹⁵ *Simon Peter was following Jesus, and so was another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest, ¹⁶ but Peter was standing at the door outside. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the doorkeeper, and brought Peter in. ¹⁷ Then the slave-girl who kept the door said to Peter, "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not." ¹⁸ Now the slaves and the officers were standing there, having made a charcoal fire, for it was cold and they were warming themselves; and Peter was also with them, standing and warming himself.*

²⁵ *Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So they said to him, "You are not also one of His disciples, are you?" He denied it, and said, "I am not." ²⁶ One of the slaves of the high priest, being a relative of the one whose ear Peter cut off, said, "Did I not see you in the garden with Him?" ²⁷ Peter then denied it again, and immediately a rooster crowed.*

For the next few weeks we hope to look at the Passion of Jesus Christ as narrated by the disciple John, "The End and the Beginning According to John."

Probably, John is "the other disciple" in today's passage. He was with Jesus in the Upstairs Room for the celebration of the Jewish Passover and he was "in the Garden" with the other disciples after the meal when Jesus was arrested (The Embedded Witness).

The Triumphal Entry has already taken place (i.e. it's AFTER Palm Sunday at this point). The Rabbi, Jesus, is coming and going with His disciples in and out of Jerusalem, teaching in the

Temple. In the 5 chapters of conversation recorded ONLY by John (13-17), at one point, one of the friends leaves the Supper...and Jesus Christ knows why.

Then the eleven disciples and Jesus leave the Upstairs Room and cross a valley and enter a Garden.

And in John's compressed version, three significant interactions take place; each one highlights a crucial truth about the spiritual life. So what do we see in the Garden from the interchanges between:

1. The Fiend and the Friend?
2. The Raid and the Reign?
3. The Faltering and the Finisher?

The dinner and conversation are over. Now, Jesus and His eleven friends go to a kind of rendezvous where they'd gathered before...a kind of secret garden... maybe a section of an olive grove.

Judas, as one of them, knew about this place and was pretty sure they'd be there. He leads an armed division to find and apprehend "Jesus the Nazarene."

John leaves out a lot of details included in the other Gospels about Judas...about the price paid for his cooperation...about his later remorse... his suicide and about that infamous, UNholy kiss.

Now a few clues and a few take-aways: 1) I called Judas a fiend... but IS that what he was? I mean, his name is synonymous with evil – his notorious crime is such that Luke 6.16 sort of takes away his name and calls him, "Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor."

But the normal word that's used is not traitor or even betrayer or betray – it's more accurately translated as morally neutral, "to hand over." There was a Greek word for "betray" (προδοτης Acts 7.52) but it's only used of Judas once. Normally it's this neutral word used 31 other times in the NT. When Jesus said, "All things have been handed over (παραδίδωμι) to Me by My Father (Luke 10.22)." He used this word often translated "betray"; better rendered "hand over."

He was a traitor (that word is used once); he was an embezzler (stole from the common purse) and maybe insecure (at being the only non-Galilean of the Twelve)... He's culpable for what he did... I'm not confident about his eternal destiny (Acts 1.25) but mainly he was the one who "handed over" the Sacrifice to the priests.

They didn't even need Judas... they could have taken Jesus in the Temple any day they'd wanted to... but Jesus was delivered to the priests – handed over as a sacrifice. "And while they were gathering together in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men..." (Mat 17.22)

Was Judas a fiend?... Yes. But the focus is NOT that he was especially evil (no one even knew he was the one) but that Jesus Christ gave Himself to His Father and to humanity fully, freely and without reserve IN LOVE and HE WAS delivered over to cruelty and death... like an offering.

And what we learn from this (among other things) is that evil is a slippery and slithering thing. There are often supernatural powers of darkness at work in human evil (John 13.2).

We ask our children, “Why did you DO that!?” and when they're very young they answer, “I dunno.” And when they get a little older (like in their late 50s!) we ask them... we ask ourselves, “Why did I do that?” and we answer, “I STILL don't know.”

Jeremiah wrote, “The heart is more deceitful than all else and desperately sick; who can understand it?” (17.9) Who can figure out WHY we do WHAT we do... So Jeremiah continued, “I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind...” (17.10A)

Truth is: motives, desires, drives, intentions – all these mysterious matters of the heart expose us as being weaker than we know... then, add the supernatural component and it's clear that we should all have a healthy wariness/skepticism of our own motives/hearts AND this passage shows that we need help from outside of ourselves.

And that's the next (2nd) take away from the idea of “fiend and friend” and that is the fact that Jesus Christ was the True Friend. He gave Himself in the act of friendship... and THAT is the worst thing you can do if you want to be emotionally safe in this world.

The only way to avoid emotional pain is to avoid having and being a friend. And here I have to quote the writer of Narnia:

There is no safe investment. To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket—safe, dark, motionless, airless—it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy, or at least to the risk of tragedy, is damnation. The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and (agitations) of love is Hell. (C.S. Lewis, The Four Loves , 1960)

Jesus Christ knew that Judas would break His heart from the very beginning and YET Jesus was a true friend to Judas and none of the disciples ever saw that Jesus treated Judas differently. He gave Judas the map to the Secret Garden and that made heartache a real possibility.

Some people see the risk in relationships and in love and they want so badly to protect themselves from the possibility of being “wrung and possibly...broken” that they withdraw into

privacy but it's always "Risk OR Rust" for the heart: perfect Love in Heaven or perfect privacy and safety in Hell.

Point #2 is (the fiend and the friend) and second, "The Raid and the Reign". Judas receives the "cohort", this military task-force and he leads them to the Secret Garden (a lot happens in the Bible in Gardens!).

When they get there with all their surveillance devices and high-tech weaponry (lanterns, torches and swords)... AND there's a big group: "cohort" was a Roman military term for 600 soldiers...and even though it's probably NOT used that technical way here – still, this is a big and well-furnished SWAT Unit! They come ready for a fight – it's a RAID!

And Jesus (note v. 4) "knowing all the things that were coming upon Him" – knowing, He still asks, "Whom do you seek?" Why does He ask that question? Seems weird.

And one possible reason is that He's saying, "Look, the Reign of God, the Invasion of God is taking place here and do you think you can stave it off with lanterns and torches and spears? Go ahead, make Me say My Name and then the real contrast between your weapons (2 Cor 10.4) and Mine will be clear, WHOM DO YOU SEEK?"

"Jesus, the Nazarene" they say.

And He answers with Two Words, (ἐγώ εἰμι – v.5) – "I Am" – the Greek Translation of the Divine Name (YHWH) and "they all fall down" (Judas too! vv. 5-6). Some scholars say this is John's version of the Transfiguration.

It's as if Jesus Christ is saying, "You're gonna need a bigger boat" (Jaws) – "You're gonna need better weapons like planets or stars and even then, you must see that you're really not TAKING ME, I'm giving Myself." And then to demonstrate the reason for His self-giving, He says, "OK – take Me... but let My friends go free (ἀφίημι - v.8 – "forgive") He gives us this beautiful, super-short summary of the Gospel – "I will be taken that YOU may be free – I will be charged and convicted of YOUR crimes that YOU may be counted innocent and perfect." He's laying down His life for His friends – He'd just told them at dinner: ""Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends." (15.13)

Now, the take-away for this second point (Human Raid and Divine Reign): It is (as I've described it before) a softly falling Reign...and yet, an irresistible Reign. The Kingdom of God comes in the form of an apparently helpless Man...a Rabbi from...where? ("Naz-a-WHAT? Never heard of it!") and His eleven frightened students. But it's like a seed... growing... and irresistibly spreading through the world... to this very day. The eleven disciples are now 2.4 BILLION.

Second Take-away: every life (on this terrestrial ball) WILL serve the purposes of this Kingdom.

YOUR life will further the ends of the Kingdom of God. All the characters we're seeing today, they all have a place in advancing God's ultimate purposes. Many of them didn't see it in their own lifetimes. The members of the Mob/Posse thought they were opposing this so-called "king" and YET they were actually carrying out the Plan of the Ages. ("King" 12x)

SOME were carrying out God's purposes as TOOLS and some as SONS.

Sons rejoice in a kind of partnership with their Father... they see and are being initiated into the Father's business and purposes. They see what He's doing and they trust Him. They don't know all the details (especially at first) but they know the Father. Jesus Christ is that Perfect Son and He IS (even as He faces the infinite horror of the Cross and the unabated weight of justice that awaits Him... as He takes the rejection that I deserve) but even now, He is full of joy. He's watching the Reign of God softly falling...the Kingdom coming (Heb 12.2).

And this Perfect Son, Jesus Christ, is bringing many sons and daughters to glory (Heb 2.10) to partnership with the Father. He's playing like the Piper moving through the whole earth and singing, "Come and join the dance and realize the purpose of life and become infinitely happy in the Reign of God... Be a Son and not just a tool."

See, that's what it is to be a Christian – you move from tool to son (John 1.12-13). You are adopted by the perfect Parent... who by His Spirit comes to live in you to empower you so you move in the direction of the family likeness (Rom 8.28-30) and the family destiny.

If you refuse, still, your life will end up advancing God's ultimate plan (like the life of Judas and the priests and the cohort – tools one and all). But even now God is offering you help "extra nos" (from outside ourselves!) If you have any sense that Jesus Christ went to the Garden that Adam defiled – and went there to renew/reclaim the Garden... to give us forgiveness and new life then GO WITH IT! Believe and put your past, present and future with Him.

He is the Son who is making other sons/daughters – He's turning tools into beloved children of the King!

Last point (briefest): The Faltering and the Finisher – the third interaction (to this point) is between Peter and Jesus Christ. Peter falters and denies his Friend (John 15.15). and Jesus Christ stays true and loyal and makes the good confession before Pilate (1 Tim 6.12-13) It wasn't cowardice that made Peter deny Jesus Christ three times; it was the implosion of the self...Peter's refusal to see how weak and needy he really was. He was yet to see how much he needed God and grace and the present work/power of the Spirit. He needed Jesus to do it all for him! Peter had resisted Jesus Christ a number of times – "No, Lord! You'll never wash my feet... You will not die for ME... in fact, I'll happily die for you!"

And each time Jesus patiently says, “Peter, this is the voice of the Devil! Peter, God has to serve YOU before YOU can serve Him!” Peter cuts off the slave’s ear (Malchus = my King) as if Peter is saying, “Ah-ha! I am on the Lord’s side! And I will defend Him in His time of need! I’m there for you Jesus (no matter how weak these other wimps are!) You can count on me! I got your back!”

And Jesus is saying, “Your sin and pride and bravado and works are useless to me... Your efforts are NOT the solution; they’re the problem! Shall I not drink this Cup? Peter don’t you see that I’m dying to save you from your sin and self-sufficiency. I’m drinking YOUR poison!”

Twice Jesus Christ says, “I AM” in the passage, and in his self-reliant denials, Peter twice admits, “I AM NOT” (“Aren’t you His disciple?”—“I am NOT!” (οὐκ εἶμι v.17) – the “I AM” and the “I am not”) And there’s Peter in the end of this text away from the Source (the Ground of all being) and it’s cold and Peter is unable to warm himself. He doesn't have it IN him!

I’ve shared this story before but I used to have a friend I’d see quite often at Starbucks. A very tall, secular Jewish man, a retired Jazz musician from Brooklyn whose name was David – but I called him King David (once I introduced him to David King!)

He called me, “Rabbi”. He used to bother me when I was trying to read. Once he said, “Rabbi! You hear that? That’s Miles Davis! Now THAT’S music!”

Fifteen minutes later I said, “Hey, King David, you hear that? THAT’S Johnny Cash!”

He listened and says, “I like that... much better than his early stuff... He used to try too hard... too many affectations. This must be from his more recent work... when he’s old... I like that.”

And for some reason, it came to me to answer ol’ King David, and I said, “Maybe Johnny Cash, finally got weak enough.”

And King David says, “Yeah... I think you're right... I’m going to have to think about that.”

That’s what was wrong with Peter: he was too strong ... he had to fail... needed to fall hard. He had to see that he could NOT master his enemies or even himSELF.

He had to despair next to that charcoal fire and had to hear himself say, “I AM NOT...”

So that later...at another charcoal fire (on the beach) Peter could be restored and come under the Reign and hear Jesus say, “Peter, you are NOT but I AM and I am giving Myself for YOU”