

Mar. 15, 2015 – Mark 14:12-21

I Tell You the Truth...One of You Will Betray Me

- *Jesus is someone who is concerned*
- *Jesus is someone who is in control*

We often avoid having tough conversations. We do not like to be confronted by someone when we have done something wrong and we usually do want to confront others. These conversations often aren't pleasant. But sometimes confronting someone is the best thing to do – even the most loving thing to do for that person.

If we do find the courage to have a difficult conversation, we probably won't chose to do it during a celebration or a party. In Mark 14:12-21, however, Jesus has one of these tough conversations with His disciples, and He has it during their last passover party together. Jesus' "I tell you the truth" statement here teaches us much about our Savior. It shows us that Jesus is someone who is concerned and that He is someone who is in control.

These events took place on Thursday of Holy Week. This was the day when representatives of each family would bring the Passover lamb to the temple to be slaughtered by one of the priests. These priests were were trained on how to properly kill and drain the blood out of the lamb. God had commanded the Jews to not eat any meat with the blood still in it (Genesis 9:4, Leviticus 3:17, 7:26, 17:11-12). God had set aside blood to make atonement for sin (Leviticus 17:11); some of the blood of a sacrifice was to be put on the horns of the altar, with the rest poured out at the base of the altar (Exodus 29:12, Leviticus 4:7, 18, 25, 30). If the animal was not being offered as a sacrifice, the blood was to be poured out on the ground before the meat was cooked and eaten (Deuteronomy 12:16).

On the first Passover, when God freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt over 1400 years before the birth of Jesus, the blood of the Passover lamb was to be put on the door posts and the lintel (the bar above the door) of each house. On that night the Lord passed over any house with blood on the door and did not kill the first born son in that house. The Passover lamb was a substitute for their first born. When the Egyptians discovered that their sons had died, they sent the Israelites out of Egypt and out of slavery.

The Passover celebration was both a remembrance of the bitterness of the slavery under the Egyptians, which was represented by the bitter herbs they ate during the passover meal, and a celebration of the great deliverance God had provided. It was during this festive meal that Jesus told His disciples: "*Assuredly, I say to you, one of you who eats with Me will betray Me*" (v. 18). Imagine that you are sitting at this joyous celebration with Jesus as His guest. What affect would these words have had on you: "*One of you...will betray Me.*" It would have seemed like all the air was suddenly sucked out of the room!

The disciples began to be sorrowful and one by one they asked Jesus: "It isn't me, is it?" The form the disciples' question is hard to translate succinctly into English. They way they asked shows that they expected, or at least hoped for, a negative answer: "No, it's not you." But that isn't the answer Jesus gave them. He said: "*It is one of the twelve, who dips with Me in the dish*" (v. 20). "It is one of you whom I have invited to eat this Passover meal with me." These words must have hung over the rest of the evening like a dark cloud – one that Jesus could have dispelled by pointing to Judas and saying, "He is the one who will betray me." But Jesus did not do that. This shows Jesus' great concern for Judas and for all the disciples.

When we are confronted about something we have done (or plan to do), we often dig in our heels and defend ourselves. Here Jesus does not confront Judas directly; He does not single him out, which probably would have only have hardened his heart even more. Rather Jesus lovingly calls

Him to repentance by revealing what Judas going to do without naming him. Even though Jesus knew that Judas would betray Him, He still loved him to the end. Before this supper, Jesus had shown that love by washing even Judas' feet (John 13:1ff).

Jesus' words in v. 21 seem rather harsh: "*But woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had never been born.*" Ouch! But these are the words that Judas need to hear. They show how grievous a sin it is to betray Jesus. Judas was on a path that would lead to his eternal damnation. To say anything less would not have been loving. To say anything less would show no concern for Judas' soul.

This was not the first warning Jesus had given. Early in His ministry, after feeding the five thousand, Jesus warned His disciples: "*There are some of you who do not believe*" (John 6:64) and He told them plainly: "*Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil*" (John 6:70).

Jesus' words here are also not the last call to repentance that Jesus gives to Judas. When Judas led the troops to the garden of Gethsemane and drew near to Jesus to kiss Him, Jesus asked him, "*Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?*" (Luke 22:48).

Jesus did not write-off Judas as a pawn of Satan who wasn't worth His time and effort. Jesus had spent three years with him, knowing from the beginning that he would betray Him. He saw Judas as a lost person whom He came seek and to save – a person for whom He was willing to suffer and die. Jesus showed amazing patience and concern for His betrayer.

We know the rest of the story: God's kindness and patience did not lead Judas to turn from his sin to His Savior in repentance (Romans 2:4). Instead, he committed suicide in grief over having betrayed Jesus' innocent blood (Matthew 27:3-5). Despite all of Jesus' loving admonition, he rejected Jesus' call.

But Jesus' words here are not just for Judas. They were also for the other disciples. They show His concern for them as well. He didn't let them "off the hook" by pointing to Judas as the betrayer, but encouraged them to search their own hearts and consider their own sinfulness. He led them to ask themselves: "could I betray Jesus?"

When we hear of or see someone else's sin, it is easy for us to point the finger. Our sinful nature wants to build ourselves up by tearing down the other person. We want to think that *we* would never do *that* – whatever it is that *they* have done. There is a saying: "There but by the grace of God go I." It has become a cliché, which is too bad, because it is so true. We are no better than anyone else. Without God's grace – without His undeserved help – we would be doing the same thing, or something just bad. 1 Corinthians 10:12 says: "*Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.*" If you consider your heart, you know that Jesus has every reason to speak this warning to you and to me.

But Jesus did not speak these words just to fill us with sorrow, but also to show us that He has the situation in control.

The first part of the text may seem to be only loosely related to these words of Jesus. It tells how two of His disciples prepared for this Passover celebration. This account, however, does more than simply set the stage for the difficult conversation Jesus had with His disciples; it shows that Jesus is in control.

Jesus does not tell Peter and John (see Luke 22:8) explicitly where to go to prepare for the Passover. He just tells them: "*Go into the city, and a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him. Wherever he goes in, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples."*'" (v. 13-14). It seems likely that Jesus gave these obscure directions so that Judas would not know where they were meet-

ing until that very evening, so that he could not betray Jesus before His time. Jesus was eager to celebrate this Passover with His disciples before He suffered (Luke 22:15). He wanted to enjoy the time with them and prepare them for the events that would unfold over the next several days. He wanted to spend this time with them without being disturbed by the soldiers Judas would later lead to seize Him.

Peter and John went “*and found it just as He had said to them*” (v. 16). Things were not just similar or close to what Jesus described, but they happened exactly like He said. The skeptic might say that Jesus had arranged everything ahead of time – that He had told this man to wait for Peter and John and lead them to the chosen place. But there is no indication that this man knew either of the disciples or that they knew this man. And we know that for Jesus, through whom all things were created and who holds all things together (Colossians 1:17), it would be trivial to bring together this man and these disciples so that they could prepare the place where Jesus and all the disciples could celebrate the Passover in peace.

To an outside observer, it may seem that the events after the meal spiraled out of control. Jesus was betrayed by Judas, arrested, and put on trial before the high priest and Pontius Pilate – trials that made a mockery of justice and ended in Jesus being put to death. But Jesus was always in control – from the preparations for this meal all the way to when *He* gave up His spirit and willingly died on the cross to pay for your sins and mine. And He was in control even beyond that when He rose from the dead, showing He had control even over death.

Jesus words to the disciples here also demonstrate that He is control. Jesus said, “*The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him*” (v. 21). Jesus is referring to the words of Psalm 41:9 which declare: “*Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, Who ate my bread, Has lifted up his heel against me.*” And the words of Psalm 55:12-14, which say: “*For it is not an enemy who reproaches me; Then I could bear it. Nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me; Then I could hide from him. But it was you, a man my equal, My companion and my acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, And walked to the house of God in the throng.*” For over 1000 years these words had testified that the Son of Man would be betrayed by a close friend.

Jesus knew what was going to happen; Jesus knew exactly who would betray Him. And He knew that it would happen later that night. While He lovingly called Judas to repent, He did not stop him from betraying Him. He went “*just as it was written of Him*” so that God’s plan of salvation, foretold from the beginning, would be fulfilled. Jesus did everything according to plan to save you and me. He willingly laid down His life to take away the sins of the world and earn a place in heaven for us all.

Judas did reject Jesus’ call to repentance. That is why Jesus said, “*Woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed.*” But note that Jesus said, “*one of the twelve*” would betray Him not “*twelve of the twelve.*” All were capable of betraying Him. When Jesus was betrayed and arrested, all of His disciples did desert Him. But by God’s grace only the one was lost (see John 17:12) and Jesus accomplished His mission to redeem the world.

Jesus allowed Himself to be betrayed and arrested, and He gave up His life because of His concern for you. By His death and resurrection He has earned eternal life for you. He is the One who is in control of your salvation.

Do not be troubled by this hard conversation and this word of woe which Jesus spoke to Judas. It is not for you. Instead you have the joyous news that your sins are forgiven and you now have a home in heaven because Jesus shed His blood on the cross for you. For by grace you have been saved through faith; it is the gift of God given to you.

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