

Exalting Jesus Christ

"How to Love a Traitor"

INTRODUCTION:

- I. In his famous painting entitled, "The Last Supper," Leonardo da Vinci sought to capture the dramatic moment when Jesus announced to His disciples that one of them will betray Him.
 - A. Carlo Bertelli, writing for National Geographic magazine says of this famous painting, "Turmoil disrupts the Passover table as the twelve disciples react to Christ's forewarning. In capturing this moment before the traitor is revealed, Leonardo plumbed a psychological depth unknown in previous paintings of the Last Supper."
 1. We're not going to try to analyze da Vinci's portrait of the Last Supper as so many others have done, but have you ever noticed that in the painting the disciples of Jesus are grouped in threes, and in each group of three, all the participants are seen expressing shock over Jesus' announcement – all, that is, except for the betrayer.
 - a. Among the groups that Leonardo da Vinci painted are John, Peter and Judas.

- (1). John sits with his eyes closed, stunned by the news of a betrayer.
- (2). Peter is clearly outraged and grips a small sword behind his back as if he is about to strike the betrayer – whoever that betrayer may be.
- (3). Judas is sitting at the table in front of Peter. His face is in the shadows. But in his hand, Judas is portrayed clutching a leather pouch – the pouch that holds the thirty pieces of silver he had been given to betray the Savior.

- b. Sadly, Judas is clutching more than just a leather pouch containing thirty pieces of silver. He is also holding a secret that only he and Jesus know. Judas is the betrayer.

II. The story of Judas and the Last Supper shows something wonderful about Jesus.

A. It shows us the Savior's ability to love us in spite of the sins that plague our spirits.

1. This is not to say Jesus simply overlooks sin, or in some way makes light of the fact that men are sinners.

a. Rather it speaks of the Savior's ability to see men as they were created to be, and as they can become once again – sinless and pure.

- B. This scene also demonstrates how Jesus is able to have genuine love and concern for even the worst of sinners.
1. The apostle Paul speaks of this indescribable love God has for sinners in the 5th chapter of Romans.
 - a. **Romans 5:6-10** – He wrote, *"For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."*
 - b. Do you hear the words Paul used to describe those for whom Christ died? They are called *"the ungodly," "sinners,"* and *"enemies."* When Paul uses these words, he is really speaking about you and me – we all fit into this category.
 - c. And yet, *"God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*

2. The words Paul used here – *"ungodly, sinner,"* and *"enemy"* (enemy of God and Christ) – are the same words we could use to describe Judas.
 - a. And yet, during this final evening Jesus spent with His disciples, He never faltered in His love for all the disciples, including (and perhaps especially) Judas.
 3. Look at the way the apostle John begins his record of this Last Supper?
 - a. **John 13:1** – He said, *"Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end."*
 - (1). *"He loved them (including Judas) to the end."*
 - (2). That's real, genuine, godly love.
- III. This morning we're going to resume our series of studies through the gospel of John that we've entitled "Exalting Jesus Christ."
- A. As we do, I want us to take a moment to observe the events of the Last Supper as they unfold.
 1. Because it is here that Jesus will teach us "How to Love a Traitor."

BODY:

- I. Before launching into that part of our study, I think it would be helpful to start by understanding a few things about the man Judas.
 - A. From the very beginning, Judas was chosen to be one of the twelve disciples of Jesus. (**cf. Matthew 10:4; Mark 3:19; Luke 6:16**)
 1. That fact alone should tell us that Judas might have become great in the service of Jesus Christ – but something went terribly wrong.
 - a. Although Jesus had called Judas to be His follower – a man chosen to be among the inner-circle of disciples – Judas apparently never allowed himself to completely love Jesus in return.
 - B. Even though Jesus knew Judas would eventually betray Him, the Lord loved Judas to the extent that He gave Judas warning after warning.
 1. After Jesus rejected the attempts of some of His followers to make Him a king, many of those same followers deserted Jesus and would follow Him no more.
 - a. Jesus then turned to His twelve disciples and asked them if they too were going to leave Him, to which Peter affirms:
John 6:68-69 – *"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*

- a. Judas apparently demonstrated those characteristics outwardly – but inwardly he was a thief.
- II. Biblical scholars have speculated over the years as to why Judas betrayed Jesus, and out of all this speculation have come some rather interesting, and plausible, theories.
- A. Some say Judas' love for money was the principal reason for betraying Jesus.
- 1. But that seems unlikely because Judas was paid only thirty-pieces of silver – which, according to **Exodus 21:32**, thirty-pieces of silver is the price one would pay for a slave who had been gored by an ox.
 - 2. That's certainly not a very large sum to pay for such a highly prized fugitive as Jesus.
 - a. Judas was well aware of the threats to Jesus – in fact the Lord had repeatedly warned His disciples that the chief priests and elders of the people wanted to put Him to death.
 - b. And Judas certainly had the information the chief priests and elders of the people needed to arrest the Lord at a time and place where He could be taken easily.

- c. Furthermore, Judas obviously knew the enemies of Jesus would have paid any price to help capture the renegade Galilean.
 - d. Therefore, if money were his motive, Judas could have negotiated for a much larger reward.
 - 3. And then we have to consider the fact that Judas attempted to return the money following the arrest of Jesus.
 - a. If he was only interested in selling out Jesus to His enemies, why would Judas have stayed around to watch the events unfold, and more importantly, why would he try to return the money?
 - 4. And so, the greed theory, while possible, presents some serious unanswered questions.
- B. However, it seems that the best explanation for Judas' betrayal may come from the word, "*Iscaiot*."
 - 1. Some Biblical scholars believe "*Iscaiot*" is a derivation of the word "Kerioth," a city in southern Judah said to be the hometown of Judas.
 - a. However, there is no clear evidence that Judas was from Kerioth.
 - b. And even if he was from Kerioth, then he was the only disciple of Jesus from Judah. All the other disciples were Galilean.

2. However, other scholars believe the word "*Isca*riot" is a form of the word "sicarius" – which is translated "dagger-bearer."
 - a. The "sacarii" were a fanatical fringe group of Jewish zealots, who believed God intended for Israel to rule to world.
 - b. But they also believed that God would not help Israel until they were willing to help themselves.
 - (1). Therefore, the "sacarii" were committed to a campaign of assault, murder and assassinations against any Jewish political or religious leader who gave allegiance to Rome.
 - (2). On occasion they would even resort to the assassination of Roman authorities.
 - (3). Their name came from the concealed daggers they carried beneath their robes.
 - (a). Tradition says Barabbas, the man who was released instead of Jesus, was also a member of the "sacarii," and had been imprisoned because he had murdered a Roman soldier.
- C. But even if Judas was a member of this fringe group, what would have prompted Him to betray Jesus?
 1. Judas certainly knew Jesus was a God-sent teacher – even the long-awaited Messiah.

2. But over time, it also became clear to Judas that Jesus had no intentions of being the kind of Messiah the people were expecting.
 - a. Jesus had no intentions of stirring up national patriotism and leading the Jews in an uprising against Roman oppression.
3. The kingdom Jesus came to establish was a spiritual kingdom – one in which the Lord would reign in the hearts of His disciples as King of kings and Lord of lords.
 - a. Although Jesus clearly acknowledged Himself to be the Messiah – the Son of God – He didn't do what Jews believed the Messiah would do.
 - b. Jesus appealed to men and women everywhere to turn their hearts back to God and prepare themselves for the coming of the kingdom of God.
4. Therefore, many believe Judas may have deliberately turned Jesus over to His enemies to force the Lord to act.
 - a. Perhaps Judas felt Jesus would be forced to use His divine powers to free Himself, annihilate His enemies, and would then launch the military campaign that would result in Israel's glorious victory over Rome.
5. So, rather than allow Jesus to be the kind of Messiah He had come to be, Judas may have simply been trying to force Jesus to become the kind of Messiah everyone was hoping for.

6. However, when Jesus was eventually crucified, Judas suddenly realized the terrible mistake he had made, and ended his life in suicide, grieving over having delivered the Son of God into the hands of His murderers.
 7. But regardless of what motivated Judas to betray Jesus, he was still a traitor.
- III. Therefore, I want us to spend the remainder of our time this morning looking at how Jesus demonstrates His love toward His the man who betrayed Him.
- A. In **John 13:21-22**, John says Jesus was *"troubled in spirit,"* and said, *"Most assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me. Then the disciples looked at one another, perplexed about whom He spoke."*
1. When we take a closer look at this event, there is something absolutely wonderful that emerges – and it's all in the way everyone was seated around the table.
 - a. Jesus and His disciples were not seated in the manner depicted in Leonardo da Vinci's painting during the Last Supper – they were not seated on chairs at a long table with Jesus in the center.
 - b. Rather, they were *"reclining."* Notice the verses that follow.
 3. John continues with the story: **John 13:23-26** – *"Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved."*

Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask who it was of whom He spoke. Then, leaning back on Jesus' breast, he said to Him, 'Lord, who is it?' Jesus answered, 'It is he to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it.' And having dipped the bread, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon."

- a. Jesus and His disciples were all reclining around a low table, eating in the customary manner, leaning on the left elbow which left the right hand free to eat with.
- b. When reclining in this manner, a man's head was almost literally in the breast of the person who was reclining to his left.
- c. That would place John, the author of this gospel, on Jesus' right – meaning John's head could actually rest on the breast of Jesus. **(see verse 23)**
 - (1). This is why John was able to speak to Jesus privately.
And since Peter was able to speak to John privately,
Peter was probably leaning on John's breast.
- d. But where would that put Judas? Ironically, for Jesus to be close enough to speak privately to Judas, and close enough to hand him bread that had been dipped in the bowl, Jesus may have actually been leaning against the breast of His betrayer.

3. Furthermore, according to Jewish custom, the place of highest honor at a meal was immediately to the left of the host – it was the place reserved for the most intimate of friends.
 - a. And that may have been the very place where Jesus asked Judas sit – the place of highest honor reserved for the closest of friends.
- IV. Only Judas and the Lord knew what went through the mind of Judas as he took his place beside the Savior he was about to betray.
- A. However, knowing the power of Jesus' love can soften even the most mercenary of traitors, Satan quickly steps in to make sure his plans are not thwarted.
 1. We're told: **John 13:27a** – We're told, "*Now after the piece of bread, Satan entered him.*"
 - a. Obviously Satan couldn't have entered Judas unless he made room in his heart to receive him.
 - b. Therefore, Jesus, knowing all hope was lost, simply told Judas, "*What you do, do quickly.*" (**John 13:27b**)
 2. This would have been the perfect opportunity for Jesus to reveal the betrayer's identity to everyone in the room – and yet, that's the very thing he did not do.

- a. Even though Jesus told John the betrayer would be, *"he to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it,"* and then proceeded to give it to Judas, John apparently didn't catch on.
 - b. The rest of this passage says, **John 13:28-29** – *"But no one at the table knew for what reason He said this to him ("what you do, do quickly"). For some thought, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus had said to him, 'Buy those things we need for the feast,' or that he should give something to the poor."*
- B. Would you be able to handle the situation in the way Jesus did?
1. Would you intentionally and deliberately give your betrayer the place of honor?
 - b. Would you have seated your betrayer so close to you that you could literally lean against them?
 2. Would you have let your betrayer know you had unfolded their plot, but at the same time, do it in such a way that no one else in the room would even suspect them?
- C. Sadly, even the gracious, loving and gentle manner in which Jesus exposed Judas failed to impact the betrayer's heart.
1. Like Pharaoh during the days of Moses, Judas' heart remains hardened – unyielding and unchanged.

2. And so, John tells us: **John 13:30** – *"Having received the piece of bread, he (Judas) then went out immediately. And it was night."*
 - a. Judas left the company of Jesus and His beloved friends for the last time as a disciple – he will return in a few hours to the Garden of Gethsemane as a betrayer.
 - b. He will never again enjoy the close companionship of Jesus and the other disciples.
 - c. All alone, Judas slips into the darkness of the night – far from the Savior who had given him love and acceptance.

CONCLUSION:

- I. There are several wonderful lessons we can learn from the way Jesus demonstrated His love toward His betrayer. But let's focus our attention on just two.
 - A. The first lesson we need to learn (and probably one of the most difficult lessons we need to learn) is to accept offenses without holding a grudge – without becoming filled with bitter resentment.
 1. Remember, Jesus washed the feet of the very man who would be His betrayer, and He fed a morsel of bread to the very lips that would later kiss His cheek to identify Him to His captors.
 - a. This is why the apostle Paul wrote: **Romans 12:14-21** – *"Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.*

Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion. Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord.

Therefore 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.'

2. How do you handle offenses and wrongs committed against you?
 - a. Do you plot to get even when you've been wronged, or do you turn the matter over the Lord and let Him deal with it?
 - b. Do you become angry at some offense and leave the church, or do you attempt to clear up the matter and make peace once again?
3. Jesus clearly accepted offenses – even the betrayal of one of His most trusted disciples – and yet the Lord didn't hold a grudge, or allow the incident to turn into bitter resentment.

- a. All of us who want to be like Jesus will do the same.
- B. The second lesson we need to learn is to genuinely forgive and forget.
- 1. In his letter to the Ephesian church, the apostle Paul wrote:
Ephesians 4:31-32 – *"Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you."*
 - a. The manner in which you are to forgive others is the same way *"God in Christ forgave you."*
 - b. How does God forgive you? He forgives you unconditionally, without any reservation, blotting it completely from His memory – just as if the offense had never been committed.
 - 2. But how many times do we hear someone say, *"I can forgive, but I can never forget."*
 - a. When someone says this, what are they really saying? They're really saying, *"I can never forget, therefore I can never really forgive!"*
 - b. Of course, being human, we can't completely erase the memory of some offense from our minds – I wish we could.
 - (1). But while we may not be able to erase the memory, we can keep that memory from interfering with our relationship with the offender.

- c. Hundreds of years before Jesus was born, the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah spoke about the way God will forgive the sins of those of us who will be under the New Covenant. God said: **Jeremiah 31:34** – *"For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."*
- (1). Do you see that? God said He will remember our sins no more.
 - (2). God doesn't suddenly develop a lapse of memory when it comes to our sins – they aren't erased from His memory any more than sins against us are erased from ours.
 - (3). But when God forgives, He deliberately chooses to never remember or recall those past sins and hold them against us.
 - (4). We can do the same thing. While we can never forget the offense, we can deliberately choose to never recall or replay those past sins against us over and over in our minds.
 - (5). We can put memory of offenses and sins against us behind us forever.
- d. That's what Jesus did with Judas.

3. Jesus didn't go to the cross cursing the name of Judas. He died to forgive the sins of every Judas – of every person who betrays the Savior's love – including you and me.
- II. It's been said that "Forgiveness is the fragrance a rose leaves behind on the heel that crushed it."
- A. If that's so, could there be a fragrance any sweeter than the one of Jesus reclining next to the very one that raised his heel against the Savior?
1. The way Jesus spent His final moments that evening in the presence of His betrayer is a perfect example of His exhortation to *"love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you."*
(Matthew 5:44)
 2. But He didn't stop there – because even while on the cross Jesus prayed, *"Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."* **(Luke 23:34)**
- B. How do you respond when the heel of a betrayer comes down on you?
1. If you find it difficult or impossible to forgive others, perhaps it's because you've never really known forgiveness.
 2. You can't really give forgiveness to others unless you've first learned what it's like to receive forgiveness.
- C. Are you still carrying around the guilt of your sins?

1. If that's so, then take advantage of God's forgiveness this very day.
2. Remember, Jesus died to give it to you.
 - a. If you're not a child of God...
 - b. If you are a child of God and haven't lived as you should...