

In Nomine Jesu

The Conspiracy and the Traitor

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today is traditionally called Spy Wednesday. Today is the day that you will hear of Judas Iscariot. You will hear particularly of the events that led up to his decision to betray Jesus to the Jewish Leaders. Our Lucan text only speaks briefly to these events before moving on to the Maundy Thursday events. Therefore I will be drawing in some of the other Gospel's texts and some of the things that happened earlier in the week. First we will hear about the Jewish leaders and their conspiracy to kill Jesus.

Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called the Passover. And the Chief Priests and the Scribes were seeking how to put Him to death for they feared the people.¹

The Jewish leaders had had enough. They were fed up with Jesus. They were fed up with His teachings. But more than anything, they were fed up with the fact that He simply would not back down from them. It's easy to figure out why they were so upset with Jesus if you look at the events earlier in the week.

First of all you have the Triumphal Entry. The entire city had shown up welcoming Jesus as a victorious conquering King. He had the crowds on His side, and all of Jerusalem knew it. The Pharisees tried to get Him to calm them down, but He had refused. He even claimed that if He did quiet them the stones themselves would cry out.

Then Jesus went and prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem, the home of the Temple and home of the Chief Priests and Scribes. These

¹ Luke 22:1-2 (ESV)

Jewish leaders probably couldn't even comprehend what their religion would look like without Jerusalem and the Temple at the core of their ceremonies. They certainly didn't want other people contemplating it either.

Speaking of the Temple, don't forget that one of the very first things that Jesus did on arriving in Jerusalem was to go to the Temple. That wouldn't have been a problem if He hadn't then started driving out all the merchants who had setup shops there.

Normally the chief priests and the scribes would have been able to effectively silence someone who was making so many waves. But this time they couldn't. The people were too entranced by His Words. The Jewish leaders were even more infuriated by His Words than they were at His entrance. Those Words that the masses were being entranced by were partly teachings against the Pharisees and the other leaders.

The leaders tried desperately to catch Jesus in His own Words. They tried to trick Him into making a mistake that would turn the crowds against Him. But Jesus was not so easy to trick, and did not make a mistake. In the process, the Chief Priests, Scribes, Pharisees and even the Sadducees, all were publicly humbled and made to look like mere students before Jesus' teachings and His Word.

Adding even more to the frustration of the Jewish leaders, Jesus also started speaking more on the End Times than He had before. This not only made Jesus a doomsayer in their eyes, but made Him a doomsayer to whom people were actually listening.

Finally, enough was enough, and the chief priest and the scribes came to the conclusion that He had to die. Have you ever gotten so

something frustrated with someone that you said or did something you would normally never do?

The Jewish leaders began to plot and scheme how they could manage to arrest and kill Him. The problem was the crowds. The crowds, while being slightly put off because of a few things that Jesus had said, were still largely supporting Him and listening to Him. So the leaders of the Jews had to figure out a way to get at Him when the crowds weren't around. Enter Judas, and the rest of our reading.

Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve.²

As a popular 1970s rock opera would say, "Poor Judas." Many would have you believe this. They would have you believe that Judas was just a victim to Divine Will. But let's talk a little bit about Judas.

In his Gospel, John informs us that Judas was in fact a thief. He was the one in charge of holding the moneybag for the group, and he would apparently use some of it for himself. This seemingly unrepentant sin would have given Satan the perfect way to start sneaking into Judas. What "little sins" might you be unrepentant of? Do you have things that might give Satan a foothold in your life?

John also shares with us that it was Judas who had scolded Mary for anointing Jesus with oil just a few days before our reading. Judas, and admittedly a few other disciples, scolded Mary for the offering that she gave to our Lord. They pointed out that the oil could have been sold and the money given to the poor. Of course, the money would have been in

² Luke 22:3 (ESV)

Judas' hands before it was distributed to the poor. And chances are that no one would have noticed a few coins going missing from such a large sum.

But Jesus rebuked Judas and the other disciples at what was at the very least a semi-public dinner. Can you imagine the embarrassment that would have caused in Judas? Can you imagine the opportunity that would have offered to Satan to push Judas over the edge? Hear the next part of our text.

He went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray Him to them.³

Sadly, over the edge Judas went. He made the decision to go to the chief priests and the scribes. He went to others who felt slighted by Jesus' teachings and Words. Other people who felt that they had been publicly embarrassed by Jesus. Other people who had ceased to be children of God, and were instead children of the devil.

He joined them in their conspiracy. He plotted and schemed with them, and he made the chief priests and scribes day.

And they were glad, and agreed to give him money.⁴

Judas, letting his greed and his pride control his thoughts and actions, accepted the blood money from the Jewish leaders.

The Jewish leaders were obviously quite pleased with this turn of events. This was just the opportunity that they were looking for. Judas would know where and when He was going to be alone. He would be able to lead their guards right to Jesus, and would even be able to point Him out to the guards.

³ Luke 22:4 (ESV)

⁴ Luke 22:5 (ESV)

You can imagine that the chief priests and scribes might have thought this man was a godsend. They might have thought that God had sent Judas to them to give them the opportunity to take care of this threat. Sadly they were both right and wrong.

It was indeed their god, their father, who had sent this man to them. But their god was no longer the Great I Am. Their god was no longer the One who is mighty to save. Their god was now the devil. That can be clearly seen in the fact that they are arranging for an innocent Man to be murdered. Jesus Himself told them that the devil was their father and was a murderer from the beginning. Therefore you ought not to be surprised that these Jewish leaders are glad that have figured out a way to commit murder themselves. Alas, even Judas at this point has given in to Satan who inhabited Him.

So he consented and sought an opportunity to betray Him to them in the absence of a crowd.⁵

And so the deal was struck. Judas had agreed to betray his Lord and Master. It can be difficult to talk about what Judas did. It can be difficult to find any kind of good news in here at all. Where's the Gospel?

Well aside from what you will be hearing tomorrow night, and the night after that, you are free to remember this about Judas and the Jewish leaders. They thought that they had finally outfoxed Jesus. They thought that they had finally manipulated Him and those around Him so that they would succeed and finally be done with Him.

But they were wrong. You know what is coming. You also know that God knew what Judas and his co-conspirators would do. Jesus knew what

⁵ Luke 22:6 (ESV)

their plans were. He knew their schemes. He knew all about their little conspiracy, and He didn't stop them.

He also knows about your pet sins. He knows about the things that you don't want anyone to know. He knows the depths of your depravity. And yet, He still died for you. He allowed himself to be crucified in order to save you from those very sins that you struggle with.

He allowed Himself to be betrayed. He allowed Judas to make this horrible decision. He did all of this in order to save humanity. That includes not only you, but even the very people who were trying to kill Him. Jesus let Himself fall into the hands of His enemies. He let Himself die at the hands of His enemies. And He did it, to save them and you.

Now may the peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Spy Wednesday

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Psalms 60; Isaiah 62:11-63:7; Revelation 1:5b-7; Luke 22:1-23:56

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Soli Deo Gloria