

J. C. RYLE'S NOTES ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN
13:21-30

21. When Jesus had said these things, he was troubled in spirit, and testified and said, Verily, verily, I say to you, that one of your shall betray me. 22. Then the disciples looked at one another, doubting of whom he spoke. 23. Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved. 24. Simon Peter therefore beckoned to him to ask who it was of whom he spoke. 25. He then, lying on Jesus' breast, said to him, Lord, who is it? 26. Jesus answered, he it is to whom I shall give a sop when I have dipped *it*. And when he had dipped the sop, he gave *it* to Judas Iscariot, *the son of Simon*. 27. And after the sop, Satan entered into him. Then Jesus said to him, What you do, do quickly. 28. Now no man at the table knew for what reason he said this to him. 29. For some of *them* thought, because Judas had the bag, that Jesus had said to him, Buy *those things* we have need for the feast; or that he should give something to the poor. 30. He then having received the sop went immediately out. And it was night.

21.--[*When Jesus had thus said.*] This would be more literally rendered, "had said these things," referring to all He had just been saying.

There seems to be a kind of break or pause in the narrative here. This is the point in St. John's narrative where the institution of the Lord's Supper seems to come in. At any rate, there seems no point, comparing his account of this evening with that of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, where it can be so well fitted in. This is the view of Jansenius, Lampe, and Burgon.

[*He was troubled in spirit.*] This expression, applied to our Lord, is peculiar to St. John. We find it only in his Gospel, here and at 11:33 and 12:27. Here it seems to mean principally the pain and sorrow that our Lord experienced on seeing one of his own chosen Apostles about to betray him. In addition to this, it probably includes that peculiar agony and distress of soul that our Lord was subject to under the presence of a world's sin laid upon Him, and which we see intensified in the garden of Gethsemane.

Let it be noted that of all the Gospel writers, John is the one who dwells most fully on the Divine nature of our Lord, and also is the one who describes most fully the reality of His human affections.

Observe that to be troubled and disturbed in mind is not in itself sinful. Brentius remarks, after Augustine, how foolish were the Stoic philosophers who taught that a wise man is never disturbed in mind.

Musculus thinks that our Lord's distress and sorrow at the sight of the wickedness of Judas had much to do with this "trouble of spirit." Nothing is so sad as the sight of a hardened, incorrigible backslider.

[*And testified and said.*] The frequency with which John used the word

"testified" is very remarkable. It occurs thirty-three times in his Gospel and only three times in all the other three Gospels. Why our Lord is said to "testify" in this place is hard to see. We must suppose that it means He made an open, solemn declaration in a very impressive manner, like a witness bearing testimony to some great and unexpected fact.

[*Verily...shall betray me.*] The solemn "Amen, amen" here, as elsewhere, was calculated to arrest the attention of the disciples to the declaration our Lord was going to make. "One out of you (*i.e.*, out of your number) shall betray Me. My last and crowning trial draws near. I am about to bear a world's sins in my own body, on the tree. And painful as it is to say, the first step in the history of my passion shall be my betrayal by one of yourselves."

Let us note our Lord's thorough foreknowledge of all the details of His sufferings as well as of the great fact that He was about to be killed.

22.--[*Then the disciples looked at one another.*] The first effect of our Lord's declaration seems to have been silence. Like men stunned and amazed, the disciples looked at one another in astonishment. The thing announced was the last thing they expected hear.

[*Doubting of whom he spoke.*] The word "doubting" hardly conveys the full force of the Greek here. It is rather, as 2 Cor. 4:8, "perplexed," "puzzled."

Let us note that neither here nor afterward does any suspicion appear to have fallen on Judas. For anything we can see, he looked as good as Peter, James, and John, and as unlikely to betray his Master. The length to which hypocrisy can go is very awful.

23.--[*Now...leaning...bosom.*] To understand this we must remember the customs of the East, in the time of our Lord, about the position and attitude of the guests at a meal. They did not sit but reclined. The famous picture of the Last Supper by Leonardo DaVinci gives a totally inaccurate idea of the scene.

[*One...Jesus loved.*] There can be no doubt this was John, the writer of this Gospel. It is the first time he speaks of himself in this way, and the expression occurs afterward four times: 19:26, 20:7, 20:20.

The Greek word rendered "loved" deserves notice. It signifies the higher, nobler, and more refined kind of love. There are two words in the Greek language translated "love" in the New Testament.

Let it be noted that the general special love with which our Lord loved all His disciples did not prevent His having a particular love for one individual. Why He specially loved John we are not told. Gifts certainly do not appear so much in John as grace. But it is worth noticing that love seems more the characteristic of John than of any disciple, and that in this he showed more of the mind of Christ. It is quite clear that special friendship for one individual is quite consistent with love for all.

It is noteworthy that of all the writers of the New Testament, none goes so deep and reveals so much of the hidden things of God as he who lay in the bosom of Christ.

24.--[*Simon Peter therefore beckoned, etc.*] The characteristic forwardness and zeal of Peter come out strikingly in this verse. None seem so excited by our Lord's announcement as he is. None is so anxious to know of whom our Lord can be speaking. He cannot wait silently like the others. He makes a sign to John to ask privately who it can be. A fisherman by early training, like John, he was probably intimate with him and could make himself understood by signs.

Let us note that the whole transaction seems to show that Peter did not sit next to our Lord in the post of honor and favor. That place was given to John.

Rollock here observes that so far from Peter having any primacy among the Apostles, he here used the intercession of John!

25.--[*He then, lying on Jesus' breast, etc.*] The Greek words here would be more literally rendered, "He having fallen upon." It is so translated in eleven out of twelve other places where it occurs in the New Testament. The idea is evidently of one moving and leaning towards another, so as to get closer to him and whisper a question, so as not to be heard or observed. That this is what John did is evident. It is plain that he did not say out aloud, "Lord, who is it?"

26.--[*Jesus answered...give a sop...dipped it.*] The action by which our Lord told John He would indicate the traitor to him was probably so common at an Eastern banquet that no one at the table would remark anything about it. That it was a common way of eating is shown by Ruth 2:14, "Dip thy morsel in the vinegar." The word "sop," the marginal reading tells us, might be translated "morsel." To give a morsel, as our Lord did, was probably a mark of favor or compliment.

That our Lord's answer was whispered is evident. No one seems to have noticed it except John.

Hengstenberg observes that by this act of kindness and attention, Jesus "would touch the heart of Judas once more, if haply he might be susceptible of better emotions."

[*And when...sop...Judas Iscariot.*] The word "gave" is literally "gives," in the present tense, showing the immediate action which followed our Lord's reply to John's question.

Here, as elsewhere, it is noteworthy that John specially calls Judas "the son of Simon," in order to make it quite clear which Judas it was who did this foul deed.

Bengel remarks: "How very near to Jesus was Judas on this occasion! But in a short time after, by what a wide gulf did glory separate Jesus from Judas, and destruction separate Judas from Jesus."

27.--[*And after the sop, Satan entered into him.*] Of course, this does not mean that now for the first time Satan entered, but that from this moment Satan got full and entire possession of the heart of Judas. Up to this time he was in it, but now he possessed it.

The word "then" is emphatically given in the Greek but omitted by our translators. It should be, "After the Supper, then Satan entered into him."

Let us note the reality, personality, and awful power of our great spiritual enemy the devil. There are degrees in his power and dominion over us. If his first temptations are not resisted, he may in the end gain full and entire possession of every part of our soul and lead us captive to be his slaves. This seems the history of Judas.

Musculus observes that even at the first communion Satan was present and busy in a heart.

[*Then Jesus said...do quickly.*] The full meaning and purport of this solemn saying it is not easy to define positively. It is evidently a very elliptical saying, and we can only conjecture about it.

Of course we cannot suppose that our Lord desired to hasten on an act of wickedness, nor yet can we suppose for a moment that there was any impatience in our Lord or unwillingness to await the hour of His sufferings. But we must remember that our Lord foreknew perfectly all that was before Him in the next twenty-four hours. Does He not then speak to Judas as to one of the instruments in the great work which was about to be accomplished? Does He not seem to say, "If you must indeed do this wicked act--and I know now that the prince of this world has got full possession of your heart--go on and do it. There need be no delay. I am ready to suffer and to die. Do your part and I will do mine. The Sacrifice is ready to be slain. Do your part in the transaction and let there be no unnecessary waste of time."

Chrysostom says: This is not the expression of one commanding nor advising, but of one reproaching and showing him that He desired to correct him; but that since he was incorrigible, He let him go.

Augustine says, "This was a word rather of glad readiness than of anger."

Calvin says: "Hitherto Jesus tried by various methods to bring Judas back, but to no purpose. Now He addresses him as a desperate man: 'Go to destruction, since you have resolved to go to destruction.' In doing so, He performs the office of a Judge who condemns to death not those whom He drives of His own accord to ruin, but those who have already ruined themselves by their own fault."

Cyril starts the odd idea that our Lord addresses these words to Satan rather than Judas, and as it were challenges him to do his worst!

Gerhard sees a likeness in the expression to God's words to Balaam when He says "Rise up and go" (Num. 22:20). They did not signify approbation but

only a permission. Yet God's anger was kindled when Balaam went with Balak's ambassadors.

Musculus observes the use of the present tense here. It is not "What you are going to do," but "What you are doing now." Even at the Lord's table wickedness was going on in Judas' heart.

Lightfoot says: "I take this expression for a tacit, severe threat, pronounced not without scorn and indignation: 'I know well what you are contriving against Me. What you do, do quickly, else your own death may prevent you; for you have but a very short time to live. Your own end draws on apace.'"

Whitby compares it to Ezek. 20:39: "Go ye, serve every one his idols."

Some, as Hengstenberg, would render the Greek word for quickly "more quickly," as if our Lord wished him to hasten his work. But there seems no necessity for this.

After all, it is noteworthy that the disciples did not know what the saying meant. Even John, writing forty or fifty years afterward by inspiration of God, was not directed to explain it (though he does explain our Lord's sayings in other places). We may therefore safely leave the meaning somewhat uncertain.

That our Lord spoke these mysterious words aloud and openly so that all the company heard is quite evident from the context. John's question was a whisper; his reply was another whisper, and neither was remarked or heard by others. But the address to Judas was heard by all.

28.--[*Now no man at the table, etc.*] This verse would be more literally rendered, "Now this thing no one knew, of them that were sitting at the table, for what purpose He said it to him." The sentence confirms the statement above made that both John's question and our Lord's answer were spoken in a whisper or undertone and not noticed by anyone. This sudden address of our Lord to Judas would therefore take the disciples by surprise.

29.--[*For some of them thought, etc.*] This whole verse is interesting and throws light on some curious points.

The statement that "Judas had the bag" shows the position he occupied among the Apostles. He was so far from being suspected that he had the charge of the common store of money. Bullinger even thinks that he must have been a man remarkable for wisdom, prudence, economy, and faithfulness.

The supposition of some, that Jesus told Judas to "buy the things needed against the feast," shows clearly that our Lord did not work miracles in order to procure the necessaries required by Himself and His disciples. Christians must buy and sell like other people and must manage their money affairs with prudence and economy. It shows how little the disciples realized that their Master's death was close at hand.

The supposition of others, that Jesus told Judas to "give something to the poor," shows plainly what was our Lord's custom in the matter of almsgiving. He sanctified and adorned the practice of caring for the poor by His own example. This passage and Galatians 2:10 deserve careful consideration. It may be doubted whether the English Poor Law has not tended to shut up English almsgiving far more than is right before God.

Let us mark the snares that attend the possession, fingering, and handling of money. The man who has care of the money in our Lord's little company of followers is the very man who makes shipwreck of his soul forever though the love of money. "Give me neither poverty nor riches" should be a Christian's frequent prayer. (Prov. 30:8.)

Bullinger points out that the possession of money is evidently not in itself sinful and wicked, and argues from the verse that the Romish mendicant friars and others who made a merit of self-imposed poverty are under a complete delusion. It is not the having but the misusing of money which is sinful.

30.--[*He then...sop...immediately out.*] The hasty departure of Judas as soon as our Lord had given him the morsel and spoken the remarkable words already commented on, may easily be explained. He saw at once that our Lord knew all his plot, and dreaded exposure. His conscience condemned him, and he dared no longer sit in our Lord's company. He, at any rate, understood what our Lord meant if nobody else did. He felt himself detected and discovered, and for very shame got up and went away.

It is curious and noteworthy that John, at all events, must have known Judas to be the traitor, and yet he seems to have said nothing.

It seems very difficult to me to explain this part of the history of this memorable evening unless we admit that Judas Iscariot received the Lord's Supper with the other Apostles. From this point to the seizure of our Lord in the garden, the narrative flows on without break or interruption, and I cannot see any place at which the Lord's Supper can come in. I therefore hold strongly that Judas was actually a communicant. The subject is very fully discussed by Gerhard, who takes this view and confirms it by quotations from Cyprian, Jerome, Augustine, Chrysostom, Cyril of Jerusalem, Theodoret, Euthymius, Aquinas, Ferus, Toletus, Bellarmine, Jansenius, Baronius, Maldonatus, Calvin, Beza, Martyr, Bucer, and Whittaker. After all, the expression of Luke 22:21 appears to me unanswerable.

[*And it was night.*] This emphatic little sentence of course is not inserted without a meaning; but why, we are left to conjecture.

Perhaps it was meant to show us that Judas purposely waited till darkness to accomplish his deed of darkness. "This is your hour, and the power of darkness" (Luke 22:53).

Perhaps it was meant to show that Judas slunk off at a time when nobody could see where he went, follow him, or observe his movements.

Perhaps it was meant to show that the time was hastening on, and that our

Lord had reason to say, "What you do, do quickly."

Perhaps it was only meant to mark the precise time when our Lord delivered the exquisite address of the next three chapters. St. John loves to mark time and places in his narrative.

One thing, at any rate, is very clear. The expression shows that the first Lord's Supper was not celebrated by day but by night. The objections to an evening sacrament commonly made by certain persons are really so untenable in the face of this passage that one marvels how men of common sense can make them.