

John 13:14-31

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Preacher: Chris Roberts

[0 : 00] Great, so we're back again in John's Gospel and following on from last Thursday, we're in the last 24 hours of Jesus' life, aren't we? We're at the beginnings of what is known as the farewell discourse where Jesus prepares his disciples for his death and resurrection, for his departure.

Farewell. And tonight is the night when the plan to betray Jesus and have him killed gets into full motion. It is a dark, dark moment in the life of Jesus and in the Gospel.

Literally, isn't it, John tells us at the end that it was night time, meaning that it was a spiritually dark time as well as the time of the day.

This is the night when the greatest evil that has ever been committed on the face of this earth is about to transpire. A dark, dark moment.

But, if you can see it, it is a passage full of encouraging light. Evil done against Jesus and plotted against him and his people in its most concentrated form, we see here is under the control of Jesus himself.

[1 : 21] You may have heard the story of a man called Glenn Chambers and he wanted to go and serve as a missionary overseas to South America in the 1940s.

He'd spent months preparing and eventually he was ready to leave. It was likely that he wouldn't return home for a number of years. And so just before boarding the plane, he scribbled a quick note to his parents, thanking them for their support and prayers and expressing his excitement at serving as a missionary abroad.

That night, though, the plane that Glenn Chambers was on got into difficulty. Turbulent air currents caused the plane's engines to lose power and despite the pilot's best efforts, all of the passengers, including Glenn Chambers, were killed in a crash.

A few weeks later, after Chambers' funeral, the short, scribbled notes had amazingly survived and it was delivered to his parents.

They opened it. And on the back of the magazine that he'd torn the corner off, happened to be printed one word in bold letters. Why?

[2 : 38] Why? Why? That is the question that the disciples would be asking in about 24 hours, wouldn't it? In this night of darkness, when tragedy comes into our lives, into their lives, why?

That's the question we ask. But we see here Jesus' approach to evil and why it's so different and why it helps us to trust in him when we're faced with it.

I want us to see three things in the passage. First of all, Jesus' own experience of evil. Jesus' own experience of evil. We see, don't we, that he is a God who doesn't simply know about evil in an analytical sense, but in Christ, he has experienced evil.

And amongst the many things that Jesus did suffer, he suffered betrayal. It's one thing for the religious leaders to hate Jesus, isn't it? And we come to expect that in John.

But it's another for a close friend to plot his death. And we're introduced to Judas, aren't we? One of Jesus' inner circle. At the beginning of the passage, Jesus quotes from Psalm 41.

[4 : 04] He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me. The one that has shared bread with me is going to kick me. And verse 21, Jesus was troubled in spirit.

And he testified, he said, one of you is going to betray me tonight. You see, Jesus is not immune, is he, from the emotion and the experience and the distress of evil.

And in this case, of people letting him down. Just think, Judas is someone who's enjoyed an intimate friendship with Jesus. He's somebody who's eaten bread with him. He was invited and included at this supper.

He's enjoyed it. He's been part of Jesus' inner circle. He's been an evangelist, hasn't he? One who's shown outward signs of affection to Jesus.

And so this evil is particularly painful for him. He is someone who Jesus has honoured. Apparently, dipping bread and giving it to a guest is a sign of honour.

[5 : 11] He is, presumably, somebody that has had their feet washed along with all the other disciples just moments ago. In Christ, then, God doesn't just know about evil from afar.

He experiences it. In his relationships, in his interactions with people. And this is an evil of a particularly dark nature.

It is concentrated evil. John tells us that it was to do with the direct involvement of Satan himself. Verse 27. Satan entered Judas.

Satan, not just a demonic possession, but Satan himself, came and entered in Judas in some way. Just think about that for a second. Because Satan is not omnipresent. He is not everywhere. Like God is. He is not like God in any way.

[6 : 12] He is a creature. His forces are in different places, maybe. But Satan can only ever be in one place at one time. He is not God. He is a creature.

And tonight, he chooses to concentrate his presence in this one place. And in this betrayal. He is present most especially at this moment.

This is the night of the power of darkness. And Jesus then is experiencing an intense satanic activity.

Luke calls it the hour of the power of darkness. And that's why John says that he was troubled in his spirit. It is an intense awareness, not just of human betrayal, but of the power of Satan.

And so he experiences undiluted evil. You might know the story of Julius Caesar. Where no treachery is worse than that of a family member.

[7 : 16] Caesar was murdered, wasn't he? But among the conspirators who assassinated Julius Caesar was Marcus Julius Brutus. Great name, isn't it? And the thing with Brutus was that Caesar trusted him.

He treated him like a favoured son. And Caesar managed to resist the first assassination attempts. But the last straw was when his beloved friend Brutus approached with a dagger.

And at that point, Julius Caesar stopped struggling and famously asked, You too, Brutus? It's quite a pitiful image, isn't it, of Caesar.

And as Jesus is betrayed by his closest, we can think that it's like that story, where he experiences this terrible evil, and he's able to sympathise with us, but he's sort of caught off guard by it, isn't he? Like Caesar was. Like when things happen to us, and we're not expecting them. And we can't see them coming. That he was shocked that Judas was going to do this.

[8 : 20] He experiences evil, though, but not exactly like we do. Because we also see, secondly, Jesus' foreknowledge of evil.

Jesus' foreknowledge of evil. If you look at verse 18, Jesus speaks of betrayal, doesn't he, in that quote from the psalm. He who ate bread has lifted his heel against me.

And here's the point in verse 19. He says to the disciples, I'm telling you this now, before it takes place. That when it does, you will believe that I am he, your Messiah, your Saviour.

I want you to know, disciples, that this evil betrayal is not a Brutus moment. In 24 hours, when you ask the question, why, you will know that I knew.

I knew about it before it happened. Evil events are not a surprise to me, even when they are to everybody else.

[9 : 26] Notice how in the narrative, no one else had a clue what was about to happen. Jesus says, one of you is going to betray me. And they all look at each other, don't they?

Dumbfounded. They haven't got a clue who the foggiest he is talking about. None of them have seen it coming. None of them are thinking, ah, Judas, I knew it.

I knew it all along. There was something different about him, wasn't there? They hadn't seen that. But Jesus knew it. The enemy was devising a plan, but Jesus knew the plan.

There's no sort of bunker, there's no secret cabinet war room, there's no hidden code that Satan, that Jesus' enemies, can use to hide their intentions from him.

God reads him like an open book. And the dark enigmas that we face when evil things happen are as clear as day to God.

[10 : 30] And when no one else understands what's being said, they think Jesus is talking about Judas going and buying the meal, don't they? They are totally unaware of the presence of evil in the room.

They're unaware of the threat that is posed to their king and themselves. But the king knows. Jesus knows, and he identifies the betrayer.

He dips bread and gives it to Judas. And he makes John a witness to that identification, doesn't he? It's worth mentioning the role that John himself has here.

There's this funny little exchange, isn't there, between Peter and John, when Jesus says, someone is going to betray me. Peter kind of looks at John and motions to him and says, who's he talking about?

And John, he's close to Jesus, and he's told the secrets of the Lord's mind, isn't he? And this fills us in a little bit on John's role in being made party to the deep, penetrating truths about Jesus.

[11 : 43] It's part of his role later on in writing this gospel. A deeply spiritual, a deeply penetrating gospel. And that relationship between John and Jesus is given airtime here to help build our confidence in the words that we're reading here.

These are not just words of a biographer, or even of an eyewitness, but of a close friend and a confidant, who was made witness to the inner workings of Jesus' mind and character.

So we've seen with Jesus, he is a God who suffers evil, who feels it, but he isn't ignorant of it like we are. And there is this foreknowledge of it. But lastly, and most encouragingly, I think Jesus doesn't just know what is going to happen, he controls what is going to happen.

He is master over it. Thirdly, Jesus' sovereignty over evil. This betrayal is not a surprise to Jesus, but neither is it just blind fate.

Neither is it just destiny. There's a Greek myth about a guy called Oedipus. And he's the main character in a story where an oracle predicts that he will kill his father and then marry his own mother in the future.

[13 : 14] And Oedipus hates this idea. He doesn't want that to happen, so he tries to avoid that. But all of his schemes to avoid that simply end up hastening it.

The destined end is reached despite his and everyone else's efforts around him to avoid it, because it's fate. It's destiny for Oedipus. And we can be a bit like that.

We can know something bad is going to happen, but have no power to change it and be drawn unavoidably towards it. But again, that is not how Jesus experiences this evil.

That's not how he knows evil or anything else evil that is going to happen in the future for that matter. Because John shows us Jesus' absolute control and his initiation of events.

Notice that the initiative comes from Jesus himself. Not Judas or even Satan. The cue for Judas to set things in motion comes from Jesus in the passage.

[14 : 32] Did you see that? Verse 27 Jesus gives Judas the morsel of bread. Then Satan enters him.

And then verse 13 After receiving the morsel of bread then Judas went out. Do you see? It is Jesus who gives the signal.

It is Jesus who decides when Psalm 41 is going to be fulfilled. It is Jesus who gives the signal for the betrayal. The signal for Satan to enter in.

The signal for Judas to leave. He says to Judas now go and do what you're going to do. And Judas leaves. And here's the irony he's possessed by Satan and yet Judas still has to obey Jesus doesn't he?

Jesus is the one giving the orders. He is the one giving the cues and the signals. he is setting the times and the events he is in control.

[15 : 37] Jesus identifies his enemy his betrayer and Jesus sends him away. Jesus tolerates Judas until the time is right for Jesus.

Not before and not after. Jesus sets the timetable even for Satan's activity. Somebody once said he may be the devil but he is God's devil and he's on a leash.

And we see that all over the Bible don't we? We see it if you're familiar with the book of Job in the Old Testament. Satan ruins Job's life for a time.

But it's all under the limitation and permission and sovereignty of God to whom Satan has to give an answer. It was the hour of darkness Luke says but earlier in John's gospel Jesus says to Mary at the wedding in Cana you can remember all the way back there it is my hour my hour has not yet come.

So 24 hours after this supper not only will the disciples remember that Jesus knew that it was all going to happen but that he was Lord of all that was going to happen.

[16 : 52] It is my hour it is my time it is my betrayal it's my death I lay my life down no one takes it from me I lay it down of my own accord and so can you feel there is this tension isn't there the Lord Jesus who is sinless God whose eyes cannot bear to look upon evil controls and initiates evil for his purpose Peter who was in the room that night he would later preach in Acts 2 after the resurrection and he says this Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men do you feel the tension there and who was it who sent

Jesus to the cross who was it who betrayed who arranged the betrayal from Judas I suppose you could say well it might have been a little bit of God but it was mainly man wasn't it it was mainly people that did it so 20% God 80% evil men or you could say it was 50% God 50% evil men but John 13 and Acts 2 tell us quite clearly even though it's hard to grasp that actually it was 100% evil man and it was 100% God there were lawless personalities like Judas and Satan who were responsible for his betrayal and death they were the ones who actually killed him yet they were always under Jesus' rule without removing the responsibility they had for the actions since Judas and the killers did only what their own hearts were moved to do what they wanted to do it wasn't that Judas was turned into a puppet that night kind of like a robot he was moved down the road of his own desire to betray Jesus and so without removing responsibility God works through people's own desires and actions however evil they might be to perform his good purpose it wasn't fate as if Judas was like that guy in the Greek myth and he really didn't want this to happen and he wanted to avoid it but he couldn't because someone made him do it God's sovereignty does not work like that rather than working against our choices and despite them God works through people's choices and actions to work out his will he doesn't just know what people are going to do he kind of arrange things around that he sovereignly ordains what people are going to do and that goes for this betrayal and for any evil thing that happens in the world it's hard to get our heads around isn't it

Jesus Christ was a real victim of real evil he experienced it really and fully as any one of us would feel it and yet he knows beforehand it is going to happen and he rules when it does happen I just want to say as we close that I know some of you are going through especially hard things at the moment housing issues loss heartbreak and there will be plenty of things that nobody else knows about as well in your lives and if we look at each other's lives on a Thursday afternoon there will be plenty of things that none of us have got a foggiest clue about won't there and there will even be things in our own lives that we haven't got a clue about that are coming up in the future evil things or threats that might happen and lie ahead and when they do happen the question we ask is why well Jesus knows and all is open to him the dark moments as well as the light moments are as clear as day to him and things are never left to chance things are never left to fate with him and you are in the situation you are in because he is in control of it and when evil comes and if evil comes and if there is an evil hour or many evil hours in your life Jesus says no this is my hour if you are trusting in him and all things are worked out for the good of those who love him aren't they always meticulously timed and controlled and signalled and motioned by the Lord Jesus he is Lord of all even of the devil he is on a leash for his perfect and good purposes just as they would be on that dark night and in that dark hour for think about the good that would come from his betrayal and the killing because it was according to the definite plan and the full knowledge of

[22 : 46] God we don't know the reasons why often do we we might not be able to think of the reasons why but that's okay it is because it doesn't mean that there isn't a reason and when we're struggling with hard things we are to look to this betrayal to this passage and to the cross and see right here the God who feels it with you in Jesus but not just that the God who knows it all beforehand and who controls it all for good and so let us trust in him let's pray to him now