

Prophecy and Betrayal

"Follow Me to the Cross" Series, April 12 & 13, 2025 (Palm Sunday) | Mark 14:26-52
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Who really betrayed Jesus?

Betraying means breaking trust—turning against someone who trusts you.

Sometimes one spouse cheats on another.

Occasionally, a parent may harm a child.

A co-worker may undermine you at work, a friend may say unkind things about you behind your back, or someone may make private information public.

Betrayal always involves breaking trust. So, it usually comes as a surprise.

We have all experienced betrayals of one kind or another. It always stings.

Most of us know that Judas, one of the Twelve Disciples, betrayed Jesus.

It happened after a woman anointed Jesus' feet with expensive perfume at a home in Bethany.

Something snapped inside of Judas. It could have been the cost of the perfume. Or greed. Or impatience. We don't know why.

But Judas went to the Jewish religious leaders and agreed to betray Jesus.

Judas was a trusted disciple of Jesus. He was a friend to Jesus and to them all.

Eventually, Judas led a hostile crowd straight to Jesus and betrayed his Rabbi and friend with a kiss. A gesture of friendship and love used to harm.

Judas became the most famous traitor in history, and we think we have our culprit. Who betrayed Jesus? Judas. But is Judas the right and only answer?

We may be even quicker to think, "Well, it wasn't me! I would never do that!"

With hindsight, we know that betraying Jesus led to His trial, crucifixion, and death.

Plus, with hindsight, we know that Jesus was and is the Son of God.

None of us would betray Him. At least, that's what we tell ourselves.

But that's exactly what Peter and the rest of the Eleven told themselves. And each other. And Jesus. But they were wrong.

Are we wrong to think that we could never betray Jesus? Who REALLY betrayed Jesus?

Jesus foretold that all His disciples would betray Him.

It was a time of rising tension.

Just days before, Jesus had entered Jerusalem to chants and waving tree branches.

Increasingly, though, Jesus confronted the religious leaders for their corruption. Threatened, they decided to destroy Jesus.

And Jesus kept talking about dying and rising again. Shadows seemed to gather.

Around a table at one more meal together, Jesus asked His disciples to remember Him. But why would they need to remember Him? The shadow of betrayal was spreading over the scene.

Then, in Mark 14:27, Jesus stated clearly that all of His disciples would fall away.

After dinner, Jesus and the disciples left Jerusalem for the Mount of Olives for the evening.

Along the way, we read:

And Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away, for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.'"

Can you imagine hearing those words spoken to you? The Disciples must have been devastated. They had left everything to follow Jesus. Now, He said, they would betray Him. Why? How?

But Jesus backed up His own prophecy with a prophecy from Zechariah, chapter 13.

Zechariah 13:1 begins with a promise that, in the future, cleansing will come from the house of David (as Jesus did):

"On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness."

Then Zechariah adds that, at long last, God's people would belong to Him wholeheartedly.

But in quoting from **Zechariah 13:7**, Jesus reminded the Disciples that God's work would come at a cost to Him and to them:

"Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who stands next to me," declares the LORD of hosts. "Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered; I will turn my hand against the little ones."

Imagine that you are a disciple of Jesus and that you are hearing these words said to you!

Jesus will die. You and the others will scatter. It is written. That would be hard to hear.

Peter and the other Disciples protested.

Peter said that even if all the other Disciples betrayed Him, he wouldn't.

Jesus turned to Peter with certainty and said, "Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times."

Peter insisted with great bravado that he would die before denying Jesus, and the other Disciples agreed. Like so many of us when we are unaware of our own flaws and failures, they probably meant what they said in the moment.

How do you respond when confronted with your own flaws and failures?

Jesus confronted the Disciples with their flaws and failures, but they refused to own them, see them, or even acknowledge that they might exist.

But we often do the same thing.

We all have flaws. Sometimes they are obvious.

They are never easy to see. It's always uncomfortable. It can be deeply painful.

But when we are confronted with them, we have the opportunity to invite God to do something new in us, to make us holy and new. After all, we live on the other side of the cross and empty tomb, and we have the Holy Spirit in us. God does wonderful things to sanctify us.

But, like the Disciples, sometimes we ignore or deny our flaws. When we do, we get trapped. Then our flaws inevitably lead to failures. Which is what happened to the Disciples.

What do you do when your sinfulness comes to the surface?

All of Jesus' disciples did betray Him.

The Disciples fell asleep in the Garden of Gethsemane.

When Jesus reached the garden, He left most of the Disciples near the entrance.

He took Peter, James, and John farther into the garden. His anguish began to show, and He asked the three to watch and pray.

Jesus went farther and poured out His heart to His "Abba" and asked that the cup might pass from Him but said, "What you will is what I will do!"

He returned to find Peter, James, and John asleep—exhausted physically and spiritually.

He told them to stay awake and pray. Not for Him but for themselves and what was to come.

Three times Jesus went away. Three times He came back. Three times they were asleep.

The disciples failed to stay awake, to watch, and to pray. They failed.

Then Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss and a crowd.

Judas arrived with a mob behind him, bringing the enemy right into the place Jesus went to at night to rest safely. He greeted Jesus with a kiss, and the crowd arrested Jesus.

Mark says that one of those standing near Jesus drew a sword. John tells us that it was Peter.

Peter swung at a servant of the high priest named Malchus and severed his ear. Luke tells us that Jesus told him to stop the violence and healed the wounded man's ear.

It was over. There would be no resistance. No revolution. Just an arrest—the way you'd arrest a common thief. The disciples were flabbergasted.

Despite their protestations, all of the Disciples slipped away and fled into the darkness in Mark 14:50:

And they all left him and fled.

Jesus had been right. Fear and disappointment gripped the Disciples, and they fled.

They failed Him. Broke His trust in them. Betrayed Him.

Even Peter denied Jesus three times in the courtyard of the high priest's house.

Peter went to the home of the high priest, where Jesus had been taken. He went to the courtyard and warmed himself by a fire as he waited.

A servant girl recognized him and accused Peter of having been with Jesus. Peter denied it and retreated into the darkness, away from the firelight and warmth. A rooster crowed.

But the servant girl again said that Peter was one of them. Again, Peter denied it.

Finally, someone else noted his accent. He came from Galilee and must have been with Jesus.

Peter called down a curse on himself if he were lying. He didn't know Jesus.

Then the rooster crowed a second time. Peter failed, just as Jesus had said, and he wept bitterly, the cry of a betrayer caught in his betrayal.

The irony is that Mark is recording Peter's memories. Later, after the Resurrection, Peter did not hide his failure. He admitted it. He told the story willingly.

Are we willing to admit our own moments of failure the way Peter did?

It's never easy to face our failure.

After the Resurrection, Jesus forgave and restored Peter. He became a stronger and better Disciple, more in the image of Christ. Peter accepted the lesson, the healing, and sanctification.

Like Peter, James, and John, sometimes we "fall asleep" spiritually.

Like Judas, sometimes we seem to be one thing on the surface, when inwardly we are something else, something less, and sometimes something traitorous.

Like the Eleven, sometimes we are more interested in self-preservation than in the Kingdom of God. We run rather than stand.

Like Peter, we sometimes talk big but then do and say very little.

Being human, we are flawed. We fail. Can we admit that?

If we admit it, then, like Peter, we can be forgiven and restored. By God's Holy Spirit at work in us, we can be made holy and more like Jesus.

But admitting our flaws and failures takes great courage and trust in Jesus.

What we do matters because we are talking about betraying Jesus, the Savior and Son of God.

Jesus' anguished prayer reveals the enormity of the betrayal.

The Gospel writers vividly portray Jesus' anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Jesus' distress was obvious to Peter, James, and John who knew Him best. They saw it.

But Jesus made it clear. His soul was sorrowful—unto death. I have been sad to the point of tears and not wanting to get out of bed, but I have never been so sad that it felt like my sorrow was actually killing me. Jesus was.

Mark tells us that Jesus fell down on the ground under the weight of His sorrow and anxiety.

One Gospel writer tells us that as Jesus prayed, His sweat mixed with blood because He was so troubled. That is rare, and that has never happened to me.

And this is not all about dying. Or about dying on a cross.

People have faced death before. Some with far more composure than Jesus shows here.

Why was Jesus in such agony?

We get a clue in Mark 14:36 when Jesus begged His Father to "remove this cup" from Him:

... "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. ..."

What is this cup that Jesus would have loved to have had removed?

It wasn't the pain. Jesus was not afraid of pain. He is the Son of God

Nor was it the death. Jesus was not afraid of death. He was confident in His Resurrection.

The cup Jesus dreaded was something more.

Isaiah 51:17 helps us to understand the cup Jesus dreaded. It says:

Wake yourself, wake yourself, stand up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the LORD the cup of his wrath, who have drunk to the dregs the bowl, the cup of staggering.

The cup that Jesus dreaded was the cup of God's wrath.

On the cross, Jesus bore much more than the weight of death alone.

On the cross, God the Father would put the full weight of human sin on Jesus' shoulders. Can you imagine bearing the weight of all the sin of everyone from all time? That weight alone would be crushing.

With all that sin on God the Son, God the Father would then withdraw His presence from Jesus, God the Son. He would not be in the presence of sin, and Jesus was carrying all our sin. That separation would be a bruising blow for Jesus to bear.

Then God the Father would pour out the full weight of divine wrath on that sin that Jesus bore. God would punish sin fully in Jesus hanging on the cross. That wrath, and not the human suffering of the cross, would be a burden only God the Son could bear. It would kill Him.

That's the cup that Jesus dreaded—the cup of God's wrath that only He could bear.

Do you now see your own failure any differently?

You may be willing to confront your weaknesses, or you may be hiding from them. Either way, your sin is real.

You may be ready to admit your flaws and see something happen, or you may expect that you can go on with life as usual. Still, your sin is consequential.

Sin is not some abstract concept. What Jesus experienced on the cross, what He dreaded, and what He asked to avoid is more than an abstract concept.

Sin is a reality that came crashing down on Jesus' shoulders on the cross. Sin is the only thing that could separate God the Son from God the Father. Sin is what God the Father judged in Jesus on the cross, and that is what killed Jesus.

Do you see sin differently now? Do you see YOUR sin differently now?

We are all guilty of betraying Jesus—just like His Disciples.

Who is the mysterious young man in Mark 14:51-52 who flees naked into the darkness?

And a young man followed him, with nothing but a linen cloth about his body. And they seized him, but he left the linen cloth and ran away naked.

There is a young man here. Clearly following Jesus.

It was late, and he was just wearing his undergarment.

He was probably surprised when Judas and the mob arrived.

But when everyone else fled, he kept following. For a while. Then the crowd grabbed him by the undershirt. He wriggled free and ran into the night. Naked. Mark doesn't tell us his name.

I think Mark wants me to see myself fleeing exposed into the darkness.

By leaving this young man unnamed, we can each see ourselves in him.

When the other disciples betrayed Jesus, we know their names. Judas betrayed Jesus. James and John betrayed Jesus. Peter betrayed Jesus. We know their names, so their stories are theirs alone. Their failure is theirs. Not ours.

But this young man is unnamed. We can put ourselves in his place. His story becomes our story. Ultimately, he, like everyone else, betrayed Jesus. Then, did we betray Jesus?

I don't know about you, but I tend to view my sins as minor offenses.

But sin is not simple, like a traffic ticket. When you speed and get caught, you get a ticket, and there is a fine. You pay the fine and move on. Sin is not like that.

Sin is more like rebellion. We are subjects of God who is King. When we sin, we are rebelling against God the King. When subjects of a king rebel, what follows is not a parking ticket but war that ends in the destruction of the rebels. Sin is more like rebellion than a parking ticket.

But sin is most like betrayal. Sin is a breaking of our relationship with God. It's a violation of trust. It's betrayal, pure and simple.

That's why the penalty for sin is so high. Paul tells us that the penalty for sin is death. But it's eternal death that is separation from God forever. That's the real penalty for sin.

That's what I did. Who REALLY betrayed Jesus? I betrayed Jesus. So did you. We all did.

Reflecting on the betrayal of Jesus calls us to take responsibility for our own guilt.

As we make our way toward the cross, the betrayal of Jesus is staring us in the face.

Mark has put our role in that betrayal out there for all of us to see.

It's time to take responsibility for our own guilt and betrayal.

Taking responsibility doesn't mean that we can pay the price for our guilt ourselves.

We couldn't if we tried!

Nor does taking responsibility for our own guilt mean that we should walk around guilty or ashamed. That's not the point.

When we reflect on the betrayal of Jesus, we see that it was real and consequential.

When we take responsibility for our own guilt, we recognize that WE did that TO JESUS.

Taking responsibility for our own guilt makes us desperate for grace and grateful for Jesus.

We recognize that we are guilty. We have sinned. We have rebelled against God. We have betrayed Jesus Christ. The penalty is eternal death. We would never be done paying that penalty. We need, we long to be forgiven. We are desperate for God's grace.

And when we are desperate for God's grace, we are grateful for Jesus, abundantly grateful that Jesus took on the full weight of our sin. He drank the cup of God's wrath. He died in our place. Now we can be forgiven. Now we can experience grace. Now we can be clean! Now we can be made new! Now we can have life! Now we can have eternal life! Thank you, Jesus. I cannot say it enough. Thank you, Jesus.