

Failure of Human Strength

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[0 : 00] This is a sermon from King's Church West, William. But we are moving into a new section this week.

And we're calling this section, you can see behind me, Making All Things New. So just a quick recap. Jesus' ministry has really grown. He's come to Jerusalem. He's been really clear to his disciples and to those around.

He is going to die for the sins of the world. And it's going to happen in Jerusalem. And now we're getting into the final section. So previously, while the cross has been looming in the background and we've been slowly and steadily moving towards it, from this point, we are going to be racing towards it.

So the narrative really quickens up. And we've called this section All Things New because in many ways, although we know from our perspective that it ends in the glorious, wonderful truth that Jesus will be resurrected and come back to life, in many ways, it is really a dark, some dark things that we're looking at.

We're looking at some of the darkest moments, I believe, if not the darkest moment in human history. We're looking at the betrayal. We're looking at the trial where the Sanhedrin who will meet and the Romans get together and crucify the Lord of Glory, the one perfect man in history, murdered.

[1 : 55] And, you know, if we weren't so used to this stuff, this stuff should probably come with a health warning or something because we should feel the depth of the depravity that we will go through.

So it is dark stuff, but there is, of course, a real chink of light right the way through. And that is the conduct of Jesus. Throughout it, he never does what any one of us would do.

He never breaks. He never lashes out or in sin or in anger at what he knows he will go through for no fault of his own but for the fault of others.

That is the chink of light that we will see. And this tiny chink of light, although it will be extinguished with his death, of course it comes back to life. And that light grows and grows and grows until we get to the end of the Bible, revelation, when Jesus declares, behold, I am making all things new, which is why we called it making all things new, this section.

When he will redeem all of creation. He will redeem every single human being who will accept the invitation to be redeemed.

[3 : 05] Even though in all of that glorious light, there is still a slight dark spot. And that is the reality that although all are invited, all are welcomed in, those who choose not to accept that invitation, they won't be redeemed.

They won't spend eternity with Jesus in a redeemed creation. And today, we are going to be looking at one of those people.

So from this point onwards, you will see two disciples come to the fore. Peter and Judas. One of those two, both of them will fall badly.

One of them will be redeemed from his fall. One of them will not. The one who will not is Judas. And we're going to be looking at him today.

So, the scripture comes up behind me. Remark, chapter 14, verses 10 to 21. Then Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them.

[4 : 28] They were delighted to hear this and promised to give him money. So he watched for an opportunity to hand him over. On the first day of the festival of unleavened bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb, Jesus' disciples asked him, where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?

So he sent two of his disciples, telling them, go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. Say to the owner of the house, he answers, the teacher asks, where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?

He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there. The disciples left, went into the city, and found things just as Jesus had told them.

So they prepared the Passover. When evening came, Jesus arrived with the twelve. While they were reclining at the table eating, he said, Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me.

They were saddened, and one by one they said to him, Surely you don't mean me. It is one of the twelve, he replied. One who dips bread into the bowl with me.

[5 : 47] The Son of Man will go, just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man. It would be better if he had not been born.

I pray quickly. Lord Jesus, Lord we are entering sacred territory here, God. We are entering the moment of the turn of human history, God.

And it is not all sweetness and light. And I just pray, God, that you would enable me to present this as well as I can.

That we will give glory to you, and be grateful to you. But at the same time, take a warning. That sometimes we can do things, it is possible to do things, that if our hearts are hard enough, we won't be forgiven.

And Lord, I just pray that you would bless us, and help us to hold those two truths together. Amen. So, Judas.

[6 : 57] I think Judas is probably the most famous of all the disciples. And it is because his very name is a byword for backstabbing and betrayal.

He is almost, the name Judas has almost gone beyond the individual Judas, hasn't it? A few years ago, the Scottish football fans in the group will know this.

Greenock Morton were flying high in the championship, the second division in Scotland. Their manager, Ray McKinnon, was earning rave reviews for his performance as manager.

But one morning, after taking training, he went to their rivals at the top of the championship, Falkirk. And guess what? They offered him their manager's job and took the job.

Well, you can guess what they said to Ray McKinnon when he returned to Capello later that season. What do you think they called him? Judas! Judas! That's exactly what they said about him.

[8 : 05] So, who was Judas? Well, he was one of the twelve that was chosen by Jesus to be with him, to learn from him, to take the gospel to the ends of the earth.

He was an apostle. His name is sometimes called Judas Iscariot. The word Iscariot means man from Kiriath. And Kiriath is a town in the south of Israel.

So, it's just a description of where he was from. The reason he had that name is probably because there was two Judases. Judases? Is that the plural of Judah? Judah? Two Judah, maybe? In the thing.

So, he was Judas Iscariot. And up to this point, we don't know a great deal about him other than that he followed Jesus just as much as the rest of them.

Now, if you remember, quite a few weeks ago now, Annalise spoke to us and she told us the story of the woman who anointed Jesus with this very expensive perfume.

[9 : 01] And if you remember well, you'll know that many of the people there were angry with the woman for wasting this money on a seemingly senseless act. And Jesus, of course, rebuked them and said, No, no, she did a beautiful thing for me.

Well, Mark doesn't tell us in this gospel who it was exactly that said these things. But in the gospel of John, we know that it was Judas. So, it seems to me that something about this episode pushed Jesus over the edge.

Judas, sorry, over the edge. We don't know how long he'd been considering betraying Jesus. We don't know if it was a new idea or an old idea that he'd had for a long time. But nevertheless, something about this pushed him over the edge.

And he decided, No, no, I'm going to betray Jesus. I'm going to tell the chief priests the whereabouts of Jesus so they can arrest him, of course, bring him to trial.

And so, he goes to the chief priests and he agrees this sum of 30 silver coins, which they give him, and he agrees to give them their whereabouts. So, let's get back into the narrative.

[10:08] Jesus is with his disciples in Jerusalem. What is he there for? What are they there for? They're, of course, there to celebrate the Passover. So, let me tell you about the Passover.

It is the most important national event in Israel at this time. Now, what it is, the reason it's so important is because it celebrates a nation-forming moment for Israel.

If you recall, in the Old Testament, in the book of Exodus, the people of God were enslaved in Egypt. And Moses comes and he demands that Pharaoh let his people go, but Pharaoh refuses. And so, Moses, by the power of God, sends nine plagues of varying degrees of awfulness, basically.

And each time, Pharaoh says, no, no, no, I'm not going to let them go. And so comes the tenth and final plague. And this plague was that the firstborn son of every household will die.

[11:12] The angel of death will pass over, sorry, will visit every household and kill the firstborn son. The only people who can escape is those who kill a lamb and smear the blood over the threshold of the doorframe of the household.

And over those people, the angel of death will pass over. He will not visit that house. Their firstborn son will survive. So, that's, of course, what they do. You probably know the story. Pharaoh, every single house in Egypt loses their firstborn son.

But Israel, because they smear the blood, the angel passes over them. Their firstborn son does not die. And so Pharaoh says, leave, go. And so was born the nation of Israel, God's people.

And so this is a massive event. Now, and it specifies in the Old Testament that the Passover festival must be celebrated annually. And it must be celebrated in Jerusalem.

So that every, basically the whole country goes to the capital city, Jerusalem. They expanded the boundaries of the city to, for the influx of this massive group of people.

[12:18] And they celebrate the Passover festival together. And everybody would come with a lamb, a spotless lamb without blemish. So, no broken legs, no spots on their fleece.

And they would, so this is what happened. The lamb would be killed. It would be taken a few drops, each of these lambs. And you're talking about probably hundreds of thousands of lambs. A few drops of blood would be thrown by their priest onto the altar.

And they would take the lamb away. Each family would find a little nook or cranny somewhere to, I guess, cook the lamb.

And then they would eat it together with their family. Now, that meal was a heavily prescribed meal. You had to say certain prayers at certain times. They would talk about how everybody would eat the Passover meal with their cloak tucked into their belt. Right? Because to signify the way that Israel had to leave Egypt so quickly.

[13:23] They would eat unleavened bread. That is bread made without yeast. To say they had to leave Egypt quickly because there was no time for the bread to rise. They would eat bitter herbs with the lamb to signify the bitterness of slavery that they walked away from.

Now, this festival happens every single year. And Jesus and his disciples, each one of them would have celebrated it for sure many, many times.

The only possible exception to this is Matthew, who's a tax collector. And some may have been excluded from religious ceremonies. But we won't worry about him too much. Nevertheless, they knew exactly what was going to happen.

Now, Jesus, as you know very well, he loves an impromptu meal. Okay? Case in point, feeding of the 5,000.

He didn't even bother to bring the food. He just asked the Lord to multiply a few loads of fishes. Feeds a massive crowd of people. Away you go. But this one was different. This one wasn't impromptu. This one was special.

[14:26] Not only was it the Passover, which was in itself very special. But this Passover was particularly important. Because, of course, Jesus knows this is going to be the final Passover meal that he celebrates.

But not only that. He is going to celebrate the Passover meal. And instead of celebrating the Lamb of God, which is killed this year. And next year we'll need another lamb to kill to atone for our sins. This time, Jesus is going to present himself as the Lamb of God. Whose blood takes away our sin forever. And for all time.

So, it's got to be done right. There's no messing around this time. It's got to be done right. So, he's prearranged.

The disciples say, where are we celebrating Passover, boss? What are we doing? And he's prearranged things. He's arranged to get an upper room large and furnished.

[15:25] Now, trust me, when there's a million Israelites looking for somewhere to cook their lamb. There's not many spare rooms lying around that are large and unfurnished. So, he's clearly prearranged this. But, of course, Jesus is a marked man at this stage.

He can't just present himself in public. So, he sends two of his disciples ahead. And they've got this kind of slightly cloak and dagger signal. You'll see a man carrying some water.

What is strange about that? Well, I'll tell you why that's an interesting signal. Because there wouldn't be many men carrying water. Because rightly or wrongly, I make no judgment on this.

It was considered to be woman's work at that day and stage. So, usually, the water carrying would be done by the women. The men would be doing something else, I guess. But this time, there's a man carrying water.

That's a bit unusual. So, wink and a nod. Here we go, guys. Here's the upper room. All sorts. So, the guys prepare the Passover. And so, the meals begin.

[16:26] They're in the perfect location. So, they're sitting, eating. If you want to have a picture of this in your mind, they almost certainly weren't sitting at a table.

They would have been reclining on the floor like this. Maybe with a low table in front of them. That's how they were sat. So, when you see, you know, the Da Vinci, the Last Supper thing, where they're all sitting, looking at each other.

It probably didn't look like that. But just a little aside. So, they're reclining at the table. Now, as I mentioned to you before, everybody knows how this goes.

If you've got Christmas traditions in your family, right? Imagine that times about a million. You've got to say the right prayers at the right time. You've got to say the right psalms. You've got to explain the right bits in the right place.

But Jesus interrupts that tradition. And he says, what does he say? Verse 18. Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.

[17:26] One who is eating with me. Now, after they've got over the shock of Jesus, the rabbi, not doing things in the right order, the weight of what he has said hits them.

One of us will betray you? Now, it's interesting that at this moment, bear in mind, Judas is in the room. At this moment, nobody suspects Judas.

In fact, their first reaction is almost to suspect themselves. Surely, not me, Lord. Remember a few weeks ago, Peter said, Jesus, we have left everything to follow you.

They were all in the same boat. Why would any of us, they're looking at one another, why would any of us betray you? What does Jesus say?

He says, yeah. It is one of the twelve. One who dips his bread into the bowl with me.

[18:36] Here, he is paraphrasing Psalm 41, when David laments being betrayed by his friends.

And he says, even my friend who broke bread with me, even he betrayed me. He's saying, yeah, you are my closest friends.

Even one of you will betray me. And here, next, he's talking to Judas specifically.

He says, the Son of Man will go, just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man. It will be better for him if he had not been born.

Now, you could look at these words and say, wow, that is harsh. But I want you here to consider the kindness and the mercy of Jesus in what he says.

[19:43] He here is not condemning Judas. He is warning Judas. He is offering an invitation to Judas to repent.

The wheels have been set in motion for sure. But it is not too late for Judas to turn around and repent and not do what he has set out to do.

Jesus says here, listen, the Son of Man, I will go just as it's been written about me. It doesn't matter what you do, Judas. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man.

He is saying, Judas, don't do it. It's not too late. You do not have to betray me. Nevertheless, nevertheless, we know that Judas does go through with it.

He does reveal Jesus' whereabouts to the Sanhedrin. And as you know, he has taken, he has tried, and he has executed.

[21:02] The fate of Judas is this. Following Jesus' crucifixion, he's stricken with remorse.

Notice, remorse is different to repentance. He doesn't ask forgiveness for his sins. He just knows what he's done is deeply, deeply wrong.

He won't go to Jesus. He won't go to God for forgiveness of his sins. And he can't live with what he has done.

So he does what's the only option left to him. And that is to commit suicide. Which is what he does. Now the tragedy of Judas is this.

He was with Jesus all the way through. Every time Jesus spoke about the kingdom, every time he spoke about repentance, forgiveness of sins, he was there.

[22 : 07] When Jesus fed the 5,000, when Jesus walked on water, Judas was there. He saw it all. He was with him all the way through.

The thing which, to be honest, I can't even get my head around, is that Judas was even sent out with the other 11 apostles to heal the sick, raise the dead, and drive out demons.

And he did it just as much as any of the rest of them. And yet, he still did what he did. Which of course begs the question, why?

Well, the Gospels present two reasons. One, which is kind of implied in Mark, is financial gain. 30 pieces of silver. Bit of money.

The other, which is a bit more mysterious, is it says that after Jesus made this offer of repentance, it said, Satan entered him.

[23 : 17] Now, before we talk about what that is, I want to say what it isn't. What it isn't is that Judas was somehow the helpless tool of Satan, that he was demon-possessed or something like that, and that Satan was in him and controlling his body and making him do certain things.

That is clearly not the case. He is absolutely in control of his own motives. It is him who goes to the chief priest to take the silver. It is him who leads the crowd to find Jesus.

It is him who knows the place where Jesus is. So what does it mean? Well, I think it's only possible to answer that if you have a realistic biblical view of sin and temptation.

To be tempted is not in itself sinful. It's not wrong to be tempted. We all get tempted. It's part of the human condition. We all have something inside us which kind of wants to go and sees the attraction of going the wrong way.

Jesus himself was tempted in the desert. When sin comes in is when we give in to that temptation.

When we say okay, I'm going to do it now.

[24 : 42] Temptation by its nature it's seductive. It tells us to do something that we shouldn't really do. It's interesting Satan, the word, it kind of means two things.

It means the adversary or the enemy or it means the deceiver. Temptation seeks to deceive us by telling us that we will benefit from something which will destroy us.

Sin, if it's walked in, will destroy you. That is just what the Bible shows. It says in Psalm 1 that sin, it says, blessed is the man who does not walk in the way of the wicked, does not stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers.

You see there's like a drawing in. You start just by walking in it. You can walk here, you can walk there and then all of a sudden you're standing in it. Your feet are planted in it and then before long you're sitting in it.

It's hard to walk sitting down. It's hard to walk away from sin sitting down, isn't it? That's what sin does to it. It draws a sin. The furrows go deep. I don't know if you've ever tried to drive a car in a muddy field.

[26 : 07] What happens is if you pick the wrong spot the tires go in the mud and they just spin and spin and spin and guess what happens? The furrow gets deeper and deeper and deeper.

That's what sin is like. If you walk in it, if you sit in it, if you stay in it, what does it mean by Satan entered him? Well, I'm not 100% sure if I'm honest, but I think what it means is that Judas allowed the tempter in.

He said yes to him. He said, okay, I'm going to do this thing despite the warnings of Jesus. I'm going to do this thing and he invited to work alongside Satan, that deceiver, that adversary.

with this episode, I want us to be warned, but I want us to be encouraged because even at this moment, I believe the most, as Judas is halfway through the most heinous act in human history, betraying the Lord of glory, even at that moment, Jesus gives him the opportunity to repent.

And my friends, it may be that the Holy Spirit is pointing out some sin in your life, some need for repentance in your life.

[27 : 42] I'm not going to go through a list of what that could be because it could be anything, but it may be that just something is just twiggling in you as I speak. You can be encouraged that if Jesus would give Judas the opportunity to repent, he gives you the opportunity to repent.

in 1745, a young man who had been apprenticed in the Royal Navy as a sailor, went to sail on a ship called Pegasus, a slave ship.

He joined it in the Caribbean, sailed over the Atlantic to Africa to pick up some slaves to bring back to the Caribbean to work the plantations. he fell out with the captain on the way, and so when they got to Africa, this young man, this white man, was sold as a slave to an African princess, Princess Pei, and he was enslaved by her in West Africa.

After a year or so, he escaped and made his way back to Britain, slavery, where he continued to work on slaving ships. But during a storm off the coast of Ireland, the ship was set fire to and he thought he was certain to die.

And so he prayed as he was just about to jump in the water, if you save me, Lord, then I will serve you, I'll become a Christian. And he was spared, he became a Christian.

[29 : 28] And after working a few more years on slave ships, he realized that slavery was not compatible with the gospel, and so he became a leading abolitionist of slavery.

In his later years, this man wrote a hymn, which you probably know. His name was John Newton, and the hymn was Amazing Grace.

And that song, that hymn, it speaks of how God will save even the most wretched sinners. His grace applies to all.

Let's sing it together. Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.

I once was lost, but now I am blind, was blind, but now I see.

[30 : 50] It was grace. grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved.

How precious did that grace of me he have that hurt nearly he died.

Amen. Lord Jesus, I want to thank you that your amazing grace extends to the worst of sins.

It extends to us, and we have been free recipients of that. Lord, I just want to use this moment to extend your invitation to anybody who feels caught in sin, just as Judas was surely caught, and just to break free of those cobwebs, and to say, even I can receive the gift of redemption, of repentance, if that's you, just make a decision in your heart today.

Okay, Lord, I know it's going to be hard to break out this furrow, but I take that decision today, I repent of my sins today. Thank you, Lord.

[32 : 36] Amen.