

Commentary on John 13.

by fish Monday, Oct 17 2005, 4:41am

international / theology / commentary

(The Christian Concept of Betrayal)

Chapter 13 of the Gospel of John is an indictment of mainstream Christianity. It becomes evident that the churches and other popular Christian groups represent institutional or organised hypocrisy. None stand as an example of the Master's teachings.

This is not a selective attack on the hypocrisy of one mainstream religion - with the possible exception of Buddhism - they are ALL perverse.

[ESV]

1Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

Jesus has arrived at that point before the final act of atonement and the conquering of death. His whole ministry has been timed to culminate at the time of the Jewish Passover, the principal ritual ceremony on the Jewish calendar. Jesus' final act is qualified by his Love of those for whom he would ransom his life. His Love is the eternal conquering power that overcomes all obstacles. We are reminded that his mission is motivated and propelled by his continuous Love for us.

2During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, 3Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God,

Judas' betrayal is central to the Christian narrative and passion; without him the purpose of the incarnation is subverted. The devil is referred to (elsewhere) as "the prince of this world"; this verse is perhaps an indication that worldly mindedness leads to the loss of our potential glory (we become unfit to inherit the Kingdom).

The few references to Judas portray him as a materialistic man concerned with temporal matters; his character is in contrast to the other disciples. He (Judas) becomes the antithetical aspect of Jesus, one whose consciousness cannot rise above the mundane aspects of life. Judas' limited worldly consciousness may have led him to believe that he was actually doing the group a great service by eliminating a 'madman' from the role of leadership. The narrative teaches by contrast, polarities are utilised throughout the text (light-dark, life-death, good-evil etc.) in order to instruct and clearly define aspects of being. Judas and Jesus could also be interpreted as opposing aspects of human nature. It should not be forgotten that the NT is also the story of man; the consequences of false values (Judas) become clear later in the chapter.

Regardless of consequences Jesus is certain of his identity and destiny. His values lead to conviction and the certainty of salvation.

4rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. 5Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. 6He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" 7Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand."

Perhaps one of the most important lessons that the master would teach us is contained in the above verses. If the Lord of all becomes the servant of all and humbles himself in an act of servitude, surely we should learn to serve each other in humility and respect. The egalitarian social lesson of the teacher is unmistakable. In the social context no person is 'higher' or 'lower' than any other person. Humanity ignores this lesson at great cost. The other lesson is in the act of "washing" or cleansing -

the text indicates that Jesus is that principle by which we are cleansed of our impurities.

8Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." 9Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" 10Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet,[a] but is completely clean. And you[b] are clean, but not every one of you." 11For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean."

We should never be too proud to serve or accept being served; in fact it becomes imperative that we allow Jesus to cleanse our souls if we are to have a permanent place in his glory. Peter always misses the point but accepts the teaching of the master whereas the unclean spirit (Judas) remains resistant and loses the opportunity for redemption.

12When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you? 13You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. 14If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. 15For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.

In the sociological context the egalitarian "one flock", communal (Acts) and mutually cooperative are indicated in this Gospel, however, a broader interpretation would encompass every action and behaviour of the master in the world, particularly his denunciation of all forms of temporal rulership or authority, especially in the theological sphere. The failure of modern 'Christianity' to attack corruption and other forces that would exploit the people is indicative of its cowardice and worldly (Judas) orientation. The modern church, irrespective of denomination, has betrayed the master's message and example. There will be 'hell to pay' for leading his children astray.

16Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant[c] is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. 17If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. 18I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled,[d] 'He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.' 19I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he. 20Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me."

Jesus now defines our relationship with him as God; he teaches equality in the human social sphere but clearly states that we should never think we are 'above' the Creator. It is the ultimate betrayal that a servant would turn on his master or that we should turn our backs on the one who gave us everything. The prophetic aspect in the above verses would seem to verify that a lineage persists. Time or place does not restrict his (chosen) servants. His message will continue to be broadcast by those who are his representatives; people may come to know Christ through his messengers. Verse 20 promises continuity.

21After saying these things, Jesus was troubled in his spirit, and testified, "Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me." 22The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he spoke. 23One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was reclining at table close to Jesus,[e] 24so Simon Peter motioned to him to ask Jesus[f] of whom he was speaking. 25So that disciple, leaning back against Jesus, said to him, "Lord, who is it?" 26Jesus answered, "It is he to whom I will give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it." So when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. 27Then after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, "What you are going to do, do quickly." 28Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. 29Some thought that, because Judas had the moneybag, Jesus was telling him, "Buy what we need for the feast," or that he should give something to the poor. 30So, after receiving the morsel of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.

It may seem odd that Jesus continues to be deeply troubled by the propensity in man to betray. It would seem that the man (Judas) is secondary to the act of betrayal. This act becomes particularly disappointing in view of the fact that it is one "who ate my bread" then turns his heel against the master, indicating an extremely personal treachery.

Usually overlooked is the reference to "my bread", we know that the bread of Jesus is the gift of life and/or his teaching. Jesus is betrayed by one of his closest associates. If we take the view that good Scripture is always relevant and its message is timeless it would follow that it applies to all generations in a very immediate instructive sense. Good Scripture is written for humanity as it is the story of humanity; in that sense the story can be interpreted as an internal play of forces. The master promises that he will reside in all of us; this presence is that principle which may be betrayed by our tendency to perversity. Every act of aggression, spite, hate, avarice, selfishness, violence, greed etc becomes a betrayal of that living/loving principle which is Christ himself.

Our options are open and our ability to choose remains inviolate, however, our tendency to perversity is a constant challenge. Jesus becomes the focus of our treachery every time we betray each other, which in effect is a betrayal of our very Self. For this reason Jesus issues a new commandment (as follows).

31When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. 32If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once. 33Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, 'Where I am going you cannot come.' 34A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. 35By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Jesus speaks of the glory of a fulfilled life – by accepting and overcoming our challenges regardless of consequences, we are glorified as he is glorified. This is not a blasphemous comment, it is the destiny of all to overcome and find glory as it is Christ that is our animating force.

Jesus gave the ruling Jewish elite few options, he continued to provoke them until they planned his death. Interesting to note is the reference to the 'Jews', Jesus refers to them as if to the 'other' – this would indicate his departure from that ideology and the inauguration of a new faith. Jesus also clearly indicates that each of us has our own unique course to follow.

The new commandments of Jesus are at the heart of his faith, Jesus issues the commandment to love one another as He loved us. His love is constant as clearly stated throughout the NT and at the beginning of the chapter, "he loved them to the end". In order to prevent or remedy betrayal and other negative tendencies he commands that we love each other, as he loves us (still). The failure to observe this commandment relegates all western institutional 'Christian' organisations to mediocrity and labels them as hypocrites.

36Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus answered him, "Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward." 37Peter said to him, "Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." 38Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times.

We have one companion when we are born and the same companion when we die. At these two times of life/death no other person can follow. Peter's impulse is the result of his impetuosity, when faced with the reality of events he denies his master. Like Peter we all imagine we are Christians when in actuality we deny the faith by our actions. We all betray and crucify Christ on a daily basis.

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