

## “The Point of No Return” (John 13:18–30)

Our skin is soft, like tightly woven fabric. It appears porous from the outside with millions of tiny openings that ooze sweat. But our skin is a surprisingly effective barrier. For decades medicine makers have tried to develop drugs that can be administered through the skin. Doctors call them transdermal drugs—like some pain-relieving sprays and nicotine and hormone patches. Pharmaceutical companies are racing to perfect a way to manufacture drugs that can be painlessly administered through the skin. But for all their efforts, scientists have only found a handful of compounds that go through our skin. However, if our skin is properly prepared, medicines can permeate it. Scientists have developed ointments that make the skin able to transmit drugs. They’ve used very low electrical currents to propel drugs through the skin. They’ve even invented little patches about the size of a band-aid with tiny micro needles that pierce the top layers of the skin enough to get drugs in but not deep enough to be felt by our nerves. This has all been done in an attempt to overcome the barrier of our skin.<sup>1</sup>

Spiritually, we’re the same. Our hearts have barriers. We can be immersed in God’s grace, but at times none of it permeates into our hearts. We need God to prepare our hearts so that He can administer His grace. Throughout America, many people attend church on a weekly basis and are even involved in various small groups or ministries, yet have never personally trusted in Christ. This is why it’s been said there are three kinds of believers in every church: believers, unbelievers, and make-believers.<sup>2</sup> Because the reception of faith in Christ is an invisible transaction that takes place between God and an individual, it’s often difficult to know who is a believer. Some might object, “Well, that’s easy, just look at a person’s works to determine whether one is genuine or counterfeit.” Yet, the problem with this suggestion is that many unbelievers and make-believers have more quality and quantity to their works than true believers. They have the external reality (works), but not the internal reality (faith).<sup>3</sup> This is what I call, “The Judas Syndrome.” Judas spent over three years up-close with Jesus Himself. Judas exorcised demons, healed people, and even preached the gospel. But Jesus calls him “a devil” (John 6:70) and “the son of perdition” (17:12). In the end, Judas handed Jesus over to be murdered for thirty pieces of silver (Matt 26:14–16). Judas was both an unbeliever and a make-believer. In John 13:18–30, we’ll study an account that exemplifies Christ’s amazing grace in the face of Judas’ own unbelief and hardness of heart. This account should compel us to be certain that we’ve believed in Christ as Savior. It should also motivate us to love and forgive unbelievers who reject Christ and us.

In 13:18a, in the midst of the Last Supper, Jesus says: “**I do not speak of all of you. I know the ones I have chosen.**” Jesus tells His disciples that what He is saying doesn’t apply to all of them; His words apply to those whom He has chosen.<sup>4</sup> The inference is clear: There is an impostor in their midst—Judas. But what has Jesus been saying that doesn’t apply to Judas? Most likely it is Jesus’ definitive statement in 13:17: “If you understand these things [i.e., serving others], you will be blessed if you do them.” Jesus’ point is good works *are* of great benefit to the believer. They express gratitude to God, provide visible confirmation of salvation, and serve as the basis for eternal rewards. However, good works don’t benefit the unbeliever. When good works are done apart from faith in Christ, they are of no eternal value.<sup>5</sup> The reason is simple: God only honors works that are empowered by Him and performed for Him.

In 13:8b–19, Jesus provides two reasons He alludes to Judas’ betrayal. First, Jesus wants His disciples to trust in the veracity of the Scriptures. Jesus speaks of Judas “...**that the Scripture may be fulfilled, ‘HE WHO EATS MY BREAD HAS LIFTED UP HIS HEEL AGAINST ME.’**” Jesus quotes Ps 41:9, which is about David who endured the painful experience of being rejected by a one-time friend.<sup>6</sup> Someone who had often eaten with David and enjoyed his hospitality turned on him and became his enemy.<sup>7</sup> To eat bread is a cultural symbol that refers to personal intimacy, and to lift up the heel is a symbol of personal contempt<sup>8</sup> that likely symbolizes that one had walked out on his friend.<sup>9</sup> Jesus informs His disciples about Judas so that they understand that his betrayal was all a part of God’s perfect plan.<sup>10</sup>

The second reason Jesus alludes to Judas' betrayal is He wants His disciples to trust that He's the Christ.<sup>11</sup> In 13:19 Jesus declares, **"From now on I am telling you before it comes to pass, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am He."** The phrase "I am" (*ego eimi*) is used throughout John's gospel to affirm Jesus' deity. The phrase echoes God's Old Testament name YHWH.<sup>12</sup> The name YHWH points to God's self-sufficiency. This is especially clear in Exod 3:14 when God reveals Himself to Moses as "I am." By using this Old Testament language, Jesus is claiming that He is God. Thus, it is erroneous when cynics and critics argue that Jesus never claimed to be God. As C.S. Lewis argued in *Mere Christianity*, Jesus did indeed claim to be God. Consequently, there are only three possibilities: Jesus is liar, lunatic, or Lord. There is no fourth option.

Jesus knows that soon the disciples are going to know that there's a betrayer in their midst. Jesus considers it important to tell them before it happens, lest Peter look at John and say: "Jesus really blew it. I mean, He chose twelve, and one of them was a bad choice. If He made that big a mistake, then He may not be who He said He was, or who we think He is." Jesus is saying, in effect: "I just want you to know that I know what I'm doing."<sup>13</sup> Nothing takes Jesus by surprise. He is the sovereign Son of God. After His death and resurrection, He wants His disciples to have further evidence that He is who He claimed to be—God Himself.

In 13:20, Jesus refers to the "chain of connection": Father-Son-Apostles<sup>14</sup>: **"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me."**<sup>15</sup> The one who receives the apostles receives Christ; the one who receives Christ receives God the Father. It is a logical, inevitable chain reaction. John typically uses the verb "believe" (*pisteuo*), "believe in" (*pisteuo eis*) or "believe that" (*pisteuo hoti*) to designate Christians, but he also uses the term "receive" (*lambano*) in three instances (1:12; 5:43; 13:20). This is simply a synonym for "believe," and emphasizes receiving the gift of salvation. Today, have you received God's free gift of Jesus Christ? Do you believe that He died on the cross for your sins and rose from the dead to demonstrate that He is God? If you haven't, I urge you to receive Christ today. Please don't miss an opportunity to receive the gift of salvation that Jesus offers. Tomorrow holds no guarantees. Now, if you're looking for something to contribute to salvation (like most Americans), give Jesus your sin in exchange for His righteousness. He will then transform you from the inside out.

After previously only alluding to Judas' betrayal (cf. John 6:70; 13:10, 18–19), Jesus becomes more explicit in 13:21. John writes, **"When Jesus had said this, He became troubled in spirit, and testified and said, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, that one of you will betray Me.'"** If you're familiar with the Gospels, it's easy to diminish Jesus' grief over Judas' betrayal. However, the verb "troubled" (*tarasso*) is the same word used in John 11:33 as Jesus stood by Lazarus' grave and wept. It's also the same term used in 12:27 as Jesus thought about the coming dread of the cross and said, "Now my heart is troubled." As these instances demonstrate, Jesus is heavy-hearted and grieving over one of His own disciples betraying Him.<sup>16</sup> John 13:21 demonstrates one of the most remarkable truths about Jesus' heart. On the eve of the cross, just a few hours before He is going to be crucified, our Lord's heart is troubled, not for Himself, but for Judas—the one who is going to deliver Him to death.<sup>17</sup>

In the midst of your declining physical health, who are you concerned about? When you suffer through physical symptoms, does your heart ache for someone else? Do you sense a heart of compassion that draws you into prayer? When you are in the midst of a personal trial, do you become absorbed in yourself or do you attempt to focus on someone else who is struggling as well? As you wage war with sin, do you feel a sense of humility that burdens you to be concerned for others who are living for the flesh or being devoured by the enemy? Are you aware of those who are hurting because they are experiencing trials, tests, or temptations? Could you name such people today? Will you take the time to lift these believers up in prayer? Will you pray, God increase my heart for my church family? Please give me a burden for others. When we take our eyes off of ourselves, our perspective frequently improves.

Surprisingly, in 13:22, **“The disciples began looking at one another, at a loss to know of which one He was speaking.”**<sup>18</sup> It is rather astonishing, there is no mention in the New Testament that the disciples suspect Judas or are even suspicious of him. This indicates that he “covered his duplicity very well.”<sup>19</sup> In the other three gospels, the disciples (including Judas) ask Jesus, “Surely not I?”<sup>20</sup> The eleven do not know who the betrayer is. Yet, it is likely that they are not threatened by Jesus’ prediction. After all, Jesus could calm storms, raise the dead, feed the hungry, and heal the sick. They likely assume that there isn’t any potential disaster that He can’t handle.<sup>21</sup> The possibility of personal failure is their concern, especially when they are vying with one another for a higher position in the coming kingdom.<sup>22</sup>

Naturally, in the wake of the betrayal revelation, Peter intervenes. John provides the play-by-play in 13:23–25: **“There was reclining on Jesus’ bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved. So Simon Peter gestured to him, and said to him, ‘Tell us who it is of whom He is speaking.’ He, leaning back thus on Jesus’ bosom, said to Him, ‘Lord, who is it?’”** The disciple “whom Jesus loved” is a reference to John,<sup>23</sup> who chooses to write from a third person perspective. Evidently, Peter was somewhere across the table from Jesus. He is unable to ask Jesus privately to identify the betrayer. John must have reclined on his left elbow immediately to Jesus’ right. By leaning back against Jesus’ chest John could have whispered his request quietly.<sup>24</sup>

In 13:26, we have one of the most beautiful verses in the New Testament. John writes, **“Jesus then answered, ‘That [the one who will betray Me] is the one for whom I shall dip the morsel and give it to him.’ So when He had dipped the morsel, He took and gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot.”** In the culture of Jesus’ time, to take a morsel from the table, dip it in the common dish, and offer it to someone else was a gesture of special friendship.<sup>25</sup> Interestingly, Judas must have sat near enough to Jesus for Jesus to do this conveniently (cf. Matt 26:25). Possibly, Judas reclined to Jesus’ immediate left. If he did, this would have put him in the place of the honored guest immediately to the host’s left.<sup>26</sup> Regardless, the morsel Jesus prepares for Judas was a piece of the Passover lamb wrapped in flour and rolled together. It would be dipped in sauce made of bitter herbs and eaten. Why did Jesus prepare a morsel and offer it to Judas? In the greatest act of grace ever recorded, Jesus offers Judas one more chance. Jesus offers Judas a piece of the sacrificial lamb. Jesus, the Lamb of God to be sacrificed to take away the sins of the world (John 1:29), is offering Judas Himself. He is saying, “Judas, here I am. Do you want Me?”<sup>27</sup>

How far are you to go in expressing love and forgiveness toward others? As far as Jesus who gave His life even for those who rejected and betrayed Him. Have you ever experienced betrayal? Have you been abused sexually or physically by a relative? Has your spouse ever had a physical or emotional affair? Have your children ever shared confidential information with others? Has a coworker ever run you into the ground with your boss or a fellow coworker? Has anyone from your church gossiped about you? Has a classmate spread slander about you throughout the school? Jesus’ example of unconditional love, forgiveness, and grace reminds us that we must model the same kind of compassion for those who sin against us.

Tragically, there are instances when Jesus displays magnificent grace, and humans harden their hearts. John writes, **“After the morsel, Satan then entered into him [Judas]. Therefore Jesus said to him, ‘What you do, do quickly’”** (13:27). Judas rejects Jesus’ love, which opens him up to Satan in the greatest way imaginable.<sup>28</sup> Hence, Jesus commands Judas to quickly depart, secure his silver, and betray Him. In other words, get this dastardly deed over with! Jesus recognizes that Judas has reached the point of no return. After all, you can reject the Light only so many times. If you have rejected Christ over the course of your lifetime, you may be getting dangerously close to hardening your heart to such an extent that you will not ever believe in Him. So do not make the horrible mistake that Judas did. Instead, believe in Christ today.

After Jesus commanded Judas to take care of his business, John writes, **“Now no one of those reclining at the table knew for what purpose He had said this to him. For some were supposing, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus was saying to him, ‘Buy the things we have need of for the feast’; or else, that he should give something to the poor”** (13:28–29). Again, no one suspects Judas. Perhaps, since Judas managed the money, the disciples assume that he is the least likely person to betray Jesus. After all, he is trustworthy, right? Jesus gave Judas this position of authority. Interestingly, Peter and John don’t jump up from supper and run after Judas. Somehow, Jesus’ explicit visual aid didn’t register in their minds. Maybe they thought the betrayal would happen much later and they would have time to talk some sense into Judas. Perhaps, the Lord didn’t allow them to comprehend everything that He said and did. Only God knows completely what happened on that evening.

John’s account concludes in 13:30 on the following note: **“So after receiving the morsel he went out immediately; and it was night.”** “And it was night” is a peculiar parenthetical note by the author. There is no need to mention that it is night. The setting is the Last Supper. Supper occurs at night! Obviously, the comment is more than just a time indicator; it is laden with theology. With the departure of Judas to set in motion the betrayal, arrest, trials, crucifixion, and death of Jesus, daytime is over and night has come (see 9:5; 11:9–10; 12:35–36). Judas became one of those who walked by night and stumbled because the light was not in him (11:10). Instead of receiving the light, Judas chose to walk in darkness. As a result, he sealed his eternal fate. Don’t make the mistake of Judas!

What do you think of when you hear the name Benedict Arnold? Now, you may have to dust off your mental archives and reflect back on your grammar school history class, but undoubtedly you remember Benedict’s claim to fame. You likely think of treason and betrayal. Assuredly, you remember little else about him.

What do you think of when you hear the name Robert Hanssen? You may recall, Hanssen was a brilliant FBI agent (1976–2001). He also was a seemingly devout Catholic, happily married husband, and father of six kids. He seemed to be successful in every area of his life. Yet, Hanssen spied for Soviet and Russian intelligence services against the United States for more than twenty years. He was found guilty of selling American secrets to Moscow for more than \$1.4 million in cash and diamonds over a twenty-two year period. Hanssen is serving a life sentence at a “Supermax” federal prison in Florence, CO, in which Hanssen spends twenty-three hours a day in solitary confinement. Hanssen’s story is chronicled in the made for television movie *Master Spy: The Robert Hanssen Story* (2002). A more recent movie about Hanssen’s life is entitled *Breach* (2007). His activities have been described as possibly the worst intelligence disaster in US history. Robert Hanssen will always be remembered as a man with incredible privilege and opportunity who ended in absolute failure.

What do you think of when you hear the name Judas? Obviously, you probably have not named any of your children Judas, nor do you know anyone who has done so (I hope). Like Arnold and Hanssen, Judas is linked in biblical history with treason and betrayal. He is remembered solely for how his relationship with Jesus ended. He was a miserable failure in every sense of the word.

You see, *you can have tons of religion without one ounce of salvation*. It is imperative, therefore, that you and I ensure that we are not trusting in religion. Instead, we must trust in a relationship with Jesus Christ. Will you do so today?

### **Scripture References**

John 13:18–30

Genesis 19:1–8

2 Corinthians 11:3–5

Matthew 7:21–23

Matthew 28:19–20

John 1:1–18, 29; 14:6

Luke 12:42–48

### **Study Questions**

1. Have I ever been betrayed by a friend (13:18)? What emotions did I experience? How would I compare the way I felt and acted to Jesus' interaction toward Judas? What might Jesus have done if He had been bitter toward Judas? How can I learn from Jesus' example?
2. How do the Bible's prophetic statements affect my confidence in God (13:19)? In what ways do I depend on the Bible in my daily life? When my neighbors, coworkers, family members, and friends object to the veracity of God's Word, how do I usually respond? What explanations can I use in the future that may be more compelling?
3. What motivated Judas to betray Christ (13:21)? How might Christians betray Christ today? How have I betrayed Christ with my life or my lips? What can I do to avoid betraying Christ in this way again?
4. Why were the disciples so oblivious to Judas' true character (13:22–25)? How can individuals infiltrate Christian circles as "wolves in sheep's clothing?" What can my church do to protect the body from those who are seeking to deny or destroy Christ?
5. How can someone so close to Jesus betray Him (13:26–27)? Why does familiarity with Christ sometimes breed contempt? As a believer, how can I guard myself from a hard heart? Read Hebrews 3:13. What can I do to ensure that my intimacy with Christ is fresh and vibrant?

## Notes

---

<sup>1</sup> A Preaching Today citation submitted by John B. Carpenter: [www.preachingtoday.com](http://www.preachingtoday.com).

<sup>2</sup> Kent Crockett's Sermon Illustrations, [www.kentcrockett.com](http://www.kentcrockett.com).

<sup>3</sup> Gary Derickson and Earl Radmacher, *The Disciplemaker* (Salem, OR: Charis, 2001), 59. An illuminating parallel passage is found in Matt 7:21–23: “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.’”

<sup>4</sup> While Jesus chose Judas to be an apostle, He did not choose him for salvation. Earlier in 6:70, Jesus said: “Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and *yet* one of you is a devil?”

<sup>5</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *John*. Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999), Electronic ed.; Bob Deffinbaugh, “Judas” (John 13:18–30): [www.bible.org](http://www.bible.org).

<sup>6</sup> Rabbinic interpretation took Ps 41:9 to refer to Ahithophel's conspiracy with Absalom against David. Ahithophel, like Judas, later hung himself (2 Sam 16:20–17:3, 23).

<sup>7</sup> Eaton writes, “Jesus found it encouraging that David had known this experience. Jesus was the ‘Son of David’ and was walking in the footsteps of David. The Scriptures have to be fulfilled. Jesus has to experience the same kind of things David experienced.” Michael Eaton, *John*. Preaching Through the Bible (Kent, UK: Sovereign World Trust, 2009), 209–210.

<sup>8</sup> Gary M. Burge, *The Gospel of John*. NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 372. These symbols are true even today in the Middle East.

<sup>9</sup> The phrase “to lift up one's heel against someone” reads literally in the Hebrew of Ps 41 “has made his heel great against me.” There have been numerous interpretations of this phrase, but most likely it is an idiom meaning “has given me a great fall,” “has taken cruel advantage of me,” or “has walked out on me.” See NET study notes.

<sup>10</sup> John 13:19; cf. 14:29; 16:4; Matt 24:25.

<sup>11</sup> Philip W. Comfort and Wendell C. Hawley, *Opening the Gospel of John* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1994), 218.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Isa 41:4; 43:10; John 4:26; 6:20; 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19; 18:5, 6, 8.

<sup>13</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*. Revised edition. New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 553; Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*. Baker Exegetical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 411.

<sup>14</sup> Comfort and Hawley, *Opening the Gospel of John*, 218.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. John 5:23; 12:44–50; esp. 13:16.

<sup>16</sup> Köstenberger, *John*, 412 n. 8 writes, “Jesus' experience closely parallels that of David, who expressed extreme anguish over the betrayal of a close friend (Ps. 55:2–14; see also Ps. 31:9–10; 38:10; and other references to Davidic psalms noted in commentary at 11:33).”

<sup>17</sup> Hughes, *John*, Electronic ed.

<sup>18</sup> Only Matthew recorded Judas' hypocritical question, “Surely it is not I, Rabbi?” and Jesus' reply, “You have said it yourself” (Matt 26:25).

<sup>19</sup> Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 555.

<sup>20</sup> See Matt 26:20–24; Mark 14:17–21; Luke 22:21–23.

<sup>21</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*. Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 472.

<sup>22</sup> Derickson and Radmacher, *The Disciplemaker*, 64.

<sup>23</sup> This seems to refer to John himself (cf. John 13:23, 25; 19:26–27, 34–35; 20:2–5, 8; 21:7, 20–24). John's name never appears in this gospel.

<sup>24</sup> The Jews did not sit at traditional tables as we know them. They reclined, leaning on the left elbow, leaving the right hand free to eat with. Sitting in such a way, a man's head was quite literally in the breast of the person who was reclining to his left. Constable writes, “Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper* is a beautiful painting, but it does not represent the table arrangement as it would have existed in the upper room.” Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on John,” 2008 ed.: [www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/john.pdf](http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/john.pdf), 202.

<sup>25</sup> Back in the OT, we read of Boaz inviting Ruth to come fellowship with him: “Come here, that you may eat of the bread and dip your piece of bread in the vinegar” (Ruth 2:14a).

<sup>26</sup> Constable, “Notes on John,” 202.

<sup>27</sup> Tony Evans, *Who is This King of Glory?* (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 316.

<sup>28</sup> Eaton, *John*, 211.