

Free Will And Pride Luke 22:21-27

In a recent study of these scriptures, we talked at length about how our God is "Sovereign". And that as an attribute of His sovereign character, God is the "First Cause" of all that takes place on the earth.

And also in that study, we said that while yes, God really is the "First Cause" of all that takes place, we, you and I, God's creation do, most often, have a part in many of those same matters that are taking place, becoming "Secondary Causes" to the things that God is doing.

And further, we acknowledged that unfortunately, too often our "Secondary Causes" are not good ones, incidents and behaviors that are brought about by the nature that is natural to our character, a "sinful nature" that is born into us at our birth, influencing most everything that we think and say and do.

May I say this again for clarity . . . while we might earnestly want to insist that we are able to make good and right choices as we go along our way each day, our ability to exercise our "free will" as we make those choices is very often encumbered by that "sinful nature" that lives within our souls, that nature that causes many of our "Secondary Causes" to turn out wrong, bringing into question just how "free" our "free will" truly is.

In many of his writings, the learned theologian Aurelius Augustin strongly insisted that our human nature is so powerfully controlled by the sinful condition within our soul that without the empowering presence of God's Holy Spirit, a person, every person, is actually incapable of making an actual "free will" choice of their own.

And I confess to you folks that for me, I do believe that Augustin is most often right, that as I attempt to do and say the righteous things of God, I often struggle with the ability of my "free will" to carry it out. I seem most often to be as the Apostle Paul was in His struggles spoken about there in Romans chapter 7 where Paul lamented,

¹⁵I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. . . . ¹⁷As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.

¹⁹ For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. (Romans 7:15-19)

So then yes fellow Christians, for me, Augustin was right. Much too often most all of my “free will” is being empowered by my sinful nature and it is so very difficult to control, more often seeming to have a mind of its own.

Thankfully yes, there is some remedy for those kinds of responses within our souls. In those moments when you and I are able to surrender our hearts over to the Lord Jesus, our responses have some improvement. But even then, our behaviors are often not what God really desires from His beloved children.

And that is what we find taking place here in this portion of scripture as Jesus and His disciples gather in this upper room to take part in this Passover meal, the last meal that Jesus would eat with them before His crucifixion.

Here we find the Sovereign Providential Hand of God being the “First Cause” and bringing about the greatest event that will ever take place for the benefit of mankind, our Lord's sacrifice on the cross to take away our sins, while at the same time revealing to us the often usual misguided and sinful “free will” behavior of men. That truth expressed clearly in verse 22,

²² The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed, but woe to that man who betrays him.” (Luke 22:22)

And as we know from our other studies of these scriptures, the constant abiding culprit that invades men's souls and brings about the sinful and misguided behavior is the same culprit that reared its ugly head from the beginning, back there within the heart and mind of satan and then also within the heart and mind of Adam and Eve. It was then, and it is now, our “Ego”, our “Pride”, our “self-interest”. And what a powerful adversary our “Ego”, our “Pride” and our “self-interest” can be!

Let's pause for a moment and read these words given to us here in Luke chapter 22 beginning in verse 21. And listen carefully to how our Lord speaks about how this very sin of “Ego” and “Pride” and “self-interest” is laced throughout so much of the ordinary behaviors of men. Here Jesus is saying to His disciples that,

²¹ “. . . behold, the hand of the one betraying Me is with Mine on the table. ²² “For indeed, the Son of Man is going as it has been determined;

but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!" ²³ And they began to discuss among themselves which one of them it might be who was going to do this thing.

²⁴ And there arose also a dispute among them as to which one of them was regarded to be greatest. ²⁵ And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called 'Benefactors.' ²⁶ "But it is not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant. ²⁷ "For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves. (Luke 22:21-27)

Emotions are such a curious mixture within us. At one moment our emotions are driving us on to do good things with great passion. And then, in the next moment, those same emotions are driving us to do some of the most wretched and sinful of things.

And as we read these words before us today, we see those emotions clearly at work within these men that are gathered around the Lord Jesus.

First, there is Judas, though his name is unspoken, he is the one whom Jesus said would betray Him to His death. We are not given much insight into the personality of Judas, except to know that He carried the money purse that paid for their expenses as they traveled about; and also that he was a thief, taking some of the money for himself.

But surely, there was a time in his life when Judas was passionate for the kingdom of God. And surely he had demonstrated his passion with right behaviors. But we aren't able to see any of that in these scriptures. We see only his worst side.

Many have wondered why Jesus chose Judas to be one of His intimate friends and disciples knowing full well, even from the beginning, and even before time and this world were ever created that Judas would do all of the vile and wretched things that he would do.

I have personally come to believe that this was the real reason that Jesus chose Judas to be one of the twelve. And may I repeat a passage that I have read to

us on other occasions recently that speaks directly about these kinds of divine prearrangements? This again from Isaiah chapter 45 where God tells us,

⁵ "I am the LORD, and there is no other; Besides Me there is no God. I will gird you, though you have not known Me; ⁶ That men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun That there is no one besides Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other, ⁷ The One forming light and creating darkness, Causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these (things). (Isaiah 45:5-7)

These are simple words but are so very profound in their meaning. Folks, let me say again. God planned and carried forward every detail of the events that were about to take place, the "First Cause" of it all.

As these words from Isaiah 45 tell us, within the events of the next few days, God would bring about darkness, and He would bring about light. He would cause great calamity and He would bring about well-being. And in amongst the rush and travail of it all, sometimes it would be hard to discern the difference. But He is trustworthy with all such matters and He would surely bring His eternal plans to fruition.

And so it would be with the betrayal of Judas. God had prearranged it all and His Great Hand would be directing each detail of it. But yes also, "free will" was involved in all that Judas did.

I confess that I do not know how God provides for both. A mysterious concurrence, God's providential hand and man's free will, both clearly and intentionally doing their part, and then somehow both becoming one in the same.

And yes, Judas would be held personally accountable for his behavior. We know that to be true because of the words that Jesus said here. Listen again!

²¹ "But behold, the hand of the one betraying Me is with Mine on the table. ²² "For indeed, the Son of Man is going as it has been determined; but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!"
(Luke 22:21-22)

These words tell us clearly that all the things that would take place with Jesus had been predetermined within the divine counsels of the Trinity of God long before this moment that we are reading about here.

All of it, Jesus' birth, His life, His ministry and now His death were all predetermined by God to take place at this very moment in time.

But again, in some divine and mysterious way, in the midst of the predetermined plans of Almighty God, we see Judas exercising his "free will". And as Jesus said of him, "but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!"

By the time Jesus spoke these words, Judas had already begun his betrayal. He had been taken over by satan and he had begun to conspire with the Chief Priests. So yes, Judas knew that it was him that Jesus spoke about.

But the other disciples were not aware of the conspiracy and they began to ask who would do such an awful thing. Verse 23!

²³ And they began to discuss among themselves which one of them it might be who was going to do this thing. (Luke 22:23)

And in another of the gospels, the disciples asked the question, "Is it I"? "Is it I"?

Many preachers throughout the years have used this opportunity of such questioning to respond to these scriptures by saying that yes, it was Judas who actually conspired with the Chief Priests to betray Jesus. But in reality, have we not all done as much?

And no, we probably would not sell Jesus to His death for money. But then again, maybe, without really meaning too, or wanting too, we have done exactly that. And probably many times over.

We make choices every day that put our wants and desires above the plans and purposes of God. And many of our choices have directly to do with money. And such decisions are most often sinful enough to do all that it takes to require Jesus to die on the cross.

And so again, yes, Judas was far more blatant with his betrayal. But our sin and the sin within those other disciples are just as responsible for the death of Jesus. So yes, it was I, it was me, and I deserve no less than Judas received for His betrayal.

But thankfully, God has given you and me, the blessed free gift of redemption. And by our receiving Christ as our Savior, we will not have to suffer the same fate as did Judas.

And the same was true for the other eleven disciples. These scriptures testify to the faithfulness shown later on by the disciples, even to their own death.

But that does not mean that these men did not struggle continually with their own forms of sin, their emotions carrying them first one way and then another. We have ample evidence of that even on this very night as they began to argue among themselves.

And yes, satan was also there with them, as he always is, busily provoking their emotions on to evil and "bad works".

First with Judas and his betrayal, then a little later that same night with Peter as satan got into the mind and voice of Peter convincing him to try to talk Jesus out of being crucified.

And then also, although his name is not said here, I have no doubt that it was satan who provoked the emotions and self-interest within the disciples as they began to fuss about who would be greatest in God's kingdom.

How quickly and easily do our emotions flare up and our minds drift from very sacred thoughts, such as the worship taking place here in this Passover celebration, on towards sinful desires of our hearts, and then on towards sinful behavior. And that was exactly what took place here in this conversation.

And so, as Jesus overheard the conversation and perceived the inmost thoughts of His disciples about who would be greatest, He no doubt grieved, knowing that in only a few hours He would be suffering and dying for just such behaviors as those.

But as seems always the way of the Lord Jesus, all such occasions were a "teaching opportunity". And so, He said to them . . .

²⁵ . . . "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called 'Benefactors.' ²⁶ "But it is not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant. ²⁷ "For who is greater, the one

who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves. (Luke 22:25-27)

Here in His words, Jesus was lovingly addressing the one thing that separates men and angels from God, and that is "pride", with all of the emotions that go with it.

And now here, in the last moments of Jesus' life, we see pride rearing its ugly head among the closest of Jesus' friends.

Consider for a moment how we men seem always to have visions of grandeur. We picture ourselves sitting at the head of the table, never in the back of the room.

Yes, some do, because of some unnamed fears within them, try to seclude themselves in a corner. But that is not our usual way.

I'm reminded of the words of a country song that resound loudly, "Nobody wants to play rhythm guitar behind Jesus. Everyone wants to be the lead singer in the band".

And it is so. And it was so for these disciples. Sinful desires and the wiles of satan were running at their peak.

And so, Jesus took the opportunity and began to teach. Verse 25,

²⁵ And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called 'Benefactors.' (Luke 22:25)

These words were so appropriate in Jesus' day, but they are also very appropriate for every generation. Government leaders in every generation seem to like to present themselves as being Lords who are also "benefactors", philanthropists that dispense money and benefits to their subjects. And their subjects sit around like little birds opening up their mouths to be fed by their benefactors?

And is not our own generation exactly the same, our present day governmental leaders thinking themselves to be kind and generous benefactors, as they hand out benefits and money that are not really theirs to give.

And yes, there are many people who do need the assistance that our leaders dispense. But the message that Jesus is conveying to us here is that positions of importance can corrupt a person's mind and cause them to misuse the authority that has been given to them.

Here, Jesus is telling His disciples that leadership is simply a needful position for certain men and women to exercise in order to accomplish the necessary things of life. And that a leader is no better than the servant.

And even further, that the leader should willingly become a servant at any and every opportunity that is needful to carry out his responsibilities.

Listen, as Jesus calls His disciples, and you and me, to a higher calling than the corruption we, so often, usually see within leadership! He says,

²⁶ "But it is not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant. ²⁷

"For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves. (Luke 22:26-27)

And to further demonstrate the meaning of His words, Jesus immediately began to wash the feet of His disciples. And then listen. This from John 13:12-17.

¹² So when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined at the table again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? ¹³ "You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. ¹⁴ "If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ "For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. ¹⁶ "Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. (John 13:12-17)

Within all those that we will see taking part in the betrayal, mistreatment and crucifixion of Jesus, pride, self-interest and emotions are always at the forefront. But in His final few hours with His disciples, Jesus is pointing them then, and us now, on to a far better way, the way of righteousness, the way of love and good works.

And we must follow His leading, else our paths will surely darken and we will perish in our way.

May I close with these words from Hebrews 12,

¹ let us lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,
² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:1-2)

Pray with me.