

Betrayal – Free Will At Work
Luke 22:47-53

Over these many years that I have had the privilege of knowing Jesus as my Savior and Lord, I have often pondered a seemingly unanswerable question concerning the matter of the “Free Will of man” . . . how yes, more often than not, my “Free Will” does take me in wrong directions. But then also, how at other times my “Free Will” is able to interact with the “Sovereign Divine Will” of God. And in those moments I somehow find myself doing His Will, “His Will”. In those moments, both His Will and My own Will somehow become the very same thing.

During those moments, a strange concurrence of thoughts and behaviors takes place within my soul that somehow combine and coalesce, to become “one”. And as I take a moment to consider what has taken place within my soul, I am so amazed and so glad hearted.

In my desire to understand this strange concept of “concurrence of thought” between my spirit and God’s Holy Spirit, I’ve sought answers through some of the writings of the better bible teachers like those of Jonathan Edwards and R. C. Sproul, writings that explore the differing views on the “Freedom of The Will”. And their wisdom has helped, but sadly, my understanding still falls short.

My Arminian friends want to say that such things are simply “coincidental”. But to try to explain such amazing occurrences as simply being “coincidental” just does not meet any test of validity. Simply put, I know with all my heart that there really is so much, much more taking place within the realms of God and man that that word “coincidence” just does not explain.

And that is especially so when we consider all the many scripture verses that loudly cry out to us in words like those given in Jeremiah 29 where God tells us clearly that He has a plan for our lives. And then, as in the Book of Isaiah chapter 45 where He tells us,

⁵ I am the Lord, and there is no other,
besides me there is no God.

I equip you, though you do not know me,

⁶ that people may know, from the rising of the sun
and from the west, that there is none besides me;
I am the Lord, and there is no other.

⁷ I form light and create darkness.

I make well-being and create calamity.
I am the Lord, who does all these things. (Isaiah 45:5-7)

And then here before us in these precious words of scripture is a perfect example. These occurrences that are taking place here in Luke chapter 22 cannot be explained with simple words like "coincidence" and "random decisions" of men.

Here in these words it is so easy to see that another very powerful Hand is at work, bringing about each of these circumstances. And I have no other choice except to conclude that it is God's Sovereign Divine Will working in coordination with man's Free Will to bring about a predetermined "Plan" that God has put into place. God's Will and man's "Free Will" becoming "one in the same".

And no, very often, as we will see in the behaviors of this man Judas, that blending of "Wills" does not always bring about a result that we might count as being "good". But we can be sure that without exception, the result will always, always be the "Divine Will of God" . . . His "Plan", His "Will"!

And so it is, as we will see today, here in this account of this man Judas, as he exercises the very worst kind of man's "free will", his "free will" behavior joins perfectly with the "Sovereign Divine Will of God", as God carries forward His plan that was foretold in the scriptures for the salvation of the souls of mankind.

And strangely , at the same time, we'll observe some similar behaviors taking place even within the hearts of some of the most devout of Jesus' disciples.

"Free Will" taking place. Yes, within Judas and within satan, and within some of the disciples, "Free Will" at its worst. But still, though it's hard for us to comprehend, their "Free Will" bringing about the "Sovereign Divine Will" of God.

And yes, though it be a perplexing example, it is also clearly the Loving Grace of God taking place within the worst of situations.

Let's pause for a moment and read the first part of this divinely developing "Plan of God" given to us here beginning in verse 47 of Luke chapter 22. Recall that Jesus and His disciples had for a while been there in the Garden of Gethsemane, with Jesus praying and the disciples sleeping. Jesus had just come to awaken His disciples, and,

⁴⁷ While he (the Lord Jesus) was still speaking, there came a crowd, and the man called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He drew near to Jesus to kiss him, ⁴⁸ but Jesus said to him, "Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?" ⁴⁹ And when those who were around him saw what would follow, they said, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" ⁵⁰ And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear. ⁵¹ But Jesus said, "No more of this!" And he touched his ear and healed him. ⁵² Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders, who had come out against him, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? ⁵³ When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness." ⁵⁴ Then they seized him and led him away. (Luke 22:47-54)

For clarity, may I take a moment and read this same account as it's given in the Book of Matthew chapter 26. There beginning in verse 47 we read,

⁴⁷ While he (the Lord Jesus) was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a great crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. ⁴⁸ Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man; seize him." ⁴⁹ And he came up to Jesus at once and said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" And he kissed him. ⁵⁰ Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you came to do." Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and seized him. ⁵¹ And behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear. ⁵² Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. ⁵³ Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? ⁵⁴ But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?" ⁵⁵ At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. ⁵⁶ But all this has taken place that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled." Then all the disciples left him and fled. (Matthew 26:47-56)

Here, in this man Judas, we find recorded the account of what most agree is surely the ultimate of all sins, the direct, intentional and purposeful betrayal of the Lord Jesus to His death.

Here, a man, an ordinary man, a man very much like you and me, a man who most likely, three years earlier when he first was chosen to join with this little band of evangelists, would never have believed that he could be capable of such an evil deed, but was here now, doing exactly that.

Yes, Judas had been provoked to do this awful thing by the most severest of temptations, one brought to him by the master of all tempters, satan himself. You will recall that earlier in these scriptures we were told that satan had actually entered into Judas. And just after that, he had gone out and made his awful plans of betrayal. Those words in verse 3,

³ Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve. ⁴ He went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray him to them. (Luke 22:3-4)

Some might want to afford Judas an excuse for his behavior, especially in light of knowing that a demon, so powerful as satan, had personally taken possession of his mind.

But may I quickly remind us that we should not attempt to make excuses for anyone for their misdeeds, not Judas, not others, and not ourselves. We do not have the authority or the privilege to excuse a person for their sins. Yes, we can empathize with them in their dilemmas, but it is God and God alone who can "excuse" sin, and then only because of the shed blood of Christ.

So no, Judas should not be given shelter and neither should he find any excuse for his behavior.

And also, we know from God's recompense to Adam and Eve for their sin in the Garden of Eden that temptation, even by satan himself, is never an excuse. Each person, regardless of the temptation, is still held personally accountable for their response.

So then, may we say again that Judas should find no excuse for his sinful deeds! I emphasize this because there are many who would hear these words and think me to be unkind and judgmental. In today's psychology-consumed mindset, many would have analyzed the meaning right out of all that Judas did wrong.

Those advocates would have looked at how Judas had first come into his relationship with Jesus, believing that Jesus would soon declare Himself to be King of all the earth.

And now here, realizing that all that he had hoped for would not take place, he developed some sort of depressive state of mind, a “mental illness” that drove him to do this awful act of betrayal.

Perhaps it might seem that I am taking this point of consideration too far, but as I observe the modern day manner of dealing with sin and crime and punishment, I have become very skeptical of our man-made answers to human behavior, especially the blaming of most all bad behavior as coming from some “mental illness”.

Folks, I am convinced that the real truth about such things is far more simple than the conclusions arrived at by our modern day behavioral experts.

Sin, in whatever form it takes and by whomever it is committed is still sin, and it is awful. And yes, sin is most often given extra power by the tempting forces of satan. But still, when all is said and done, we, each of us, you and I, are still personally and individually accountable for every behavior and willful deed we take part in. And further, that real and true justice demands an appropriate recompense for our sin.

Here, with Judas, we can clearly see the things that he did wrong. And we can also see satan's personal “signature stamp” put upon the evil deed as Judas chose to use a “kiss” as the way of identifying Jesus to the armed guards.

Many people have given their ideas as to exactly why Judas chose to use a kiss, but I believe that, in satan's mind, it was simply an ultimate form of rejection, a “mocking” of all that Jesus stood for, especially “love”.

Recall that it was for “love” that Jesus came to be among us, to live and to die on our behalf. In the simple words of the best known of all bible verses, John 3:16, we're told that, “God so “loved” the world, loved us, that He gave His only Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life”.

“Love” is so very, very important to God, and Satan might have wanted to “mock” that one most important attribute of God. And so, for myself, I’m satisfied that with this one “mocking gesture” he used Judas’ lips to turn a sweet offer of “love” into a worst weapon of betrayal.

Sadly though, you and I must remain very careful in all our considerations of this event, because each of us wavers at every moment on the edge of a similar betrayal.

We think not, but what cost would it take for us to turn our backs on the Lord Jesus in favor of a more desirable or more convenient path.

As I consider my own soul and the choices I have made over my lifetime, there actually have been many times that I have betrayed Jesus in favor of a more enticing opportunity.

Did I intentionally do those things knowing that I was betraying Jesus? No, I can’t ever remember doing that! But listen . . . whether intentionally or unintentionally, if the exact same result takes place, am I not just as guilty? Have I not still betrayed Him?

A particular crime reported in the news comes to mind. A drunk driver who was involved in an accident that killed two other people was given the charge of “depraved heart murder”. The premise being that the driver cared so little for the possible resulting deaths of other people that her behavior deserved the most serious of charges, that of “murder”.

The real truth, as given in Jeremiah 17:9, tells us clearly that each of our hearts, her heart, my heart, your heart is at best desperately wicked and deceitful above all things, those scriptures asking, “who among us can fathom the depth of our own wretchedness.”

As for myself, such things seem to take only the barest of temptations, sometimes the most meaningless of opportunities, and I suddenly find myself making the most foolish of wrong choices.

I’m reminded of the words of the hymn that we sing . . .

Years I spent in vanity and pride,
Caring not my Lord was crucified,

Knowing not it was for me He died on Calvary.

Those words of that hymn are so very true. For most of the first half of my life, I lived a very callous existence, "caring not my Lord was crucified".

Thankfully, He did choose to come in and take hold of my wretched life, and to make changes within it. I now at least have the ability to make choices, and hopefully I do now make some better ones.

But may we go back for a moment and give more consideration to the question of whether or not our "intentions" make a difference in the sins we commit! And the answer is, "yes, our intentions do count."

Even if the result is still the same, and even if every sin does demand either that we personally spend an eternity in hell, or else that the Lord Jesus suffer our penalty for us, the intention within our soul as we commit that sin really does make a difference."

We see evidence of that as we observe the two kinds of responses given by the disciples. All of the disciples would desert the Lord Jesus, in some sense betraying Him. One, Judas would desert Him by betraying Him to the enemy. The other disciples would simply, because of fear, just run away and desert Him, all doing the same thing, but in different ways and for different reasons.

A comparison comes to my mind that might not seem to be exactly the same, but I believe that it does have relevance. It has to do with the manner of behavior that we have observed with the young people in our ministry to youth at French Camp Academy. Through the years, we observed some who were "willfully disobedient" in their behavior, while others were just "childishly irresponsible". And we understood that those two behaviors were very different each requiring their own form of response and discipline.

And here, in this scripture passage, we see two similar kinds of responses given by the disciples.

First with Judas, we see very "willful disobedience" as He intentionally betrayed Jesus, selling Him out for a few pieces of silver.

But with the other disciples, their response was not so willful and intentional. Yes, they deserted Jesus and ran for fear of their lives. But as evidenced by Jesus' response back to them over the coming days and years, their sin of distrust was not deserving of the same treatment that Judas received.

Judas hung himself and was called a "son of perdition". The other disciples were able to repent and to rejoin with Jesus in His purpose and calling.

So yes, getting caught up in fear and lack of trust is wrong. But because those men still wanted the eternal life that Jesus had to offer, their childishly irresponsible behavior was not eternally held against them.

So then, what must you and I gain from these words and from our observations of these men? May I suggest first that we do exactly as the Lord Jesus did, and that is, that we be diligent to keep an intimate relationship with God the Father by spending time often with Him in intimate prayer.

And next, that while yes, we must be ever-conscious of the sin that churns all around us each day, may we not allow it to gain our focus, but rather may we instead concentrate our hearts and minds upon the person of Christ and upon His Kingdom.

The words of scripture that immediately come to mind are from Matthew 6:33. There Jesus exhorts us to,

³³ . . . seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. (Matthew 6:33)

What are "these things" that Jesus spoke about here? They are the things of this life that seem always to consume our thoughts and sometimes draw us into the wrong direction, ideas, principles, desires, plans for the future, even food and clothing . . . And God knows well that we have need of many of those things. And in "His time", He will provide those things that we need.

Our part in our relationship with Him is simply to keep the eyes of our faith focused upon Him and His righteousness, and miraculously, answers will come to us, answers that we could never have thought of. And along with His answers, He will give us a special "peace that surpasses all understanding".

So then, as we close for today, may I ask . . . are you at this moment being tempted in one of the ways that these disciples were tempted, either to turn away from Christ to your own plans and ideas, or perhaps to simply run and hide from your circumstances?

Yes, you can follow after your own "Free Will" or you can do the "better thing" and choose to trust in the "Sovereign Divine Will of God" and surrender your soul to the "Plans" He has for you. Those words in Jeremiah 29 . . .

¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. ¹² Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. ¹³ You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. (Jeremiah 29:11-13)

May I suggest that you and I, fervently and diligently choose to surrender ourselves over to fully "trusting" in the plans our Lord has for us, and to especially surrender the thing within our soul that we call our "Free Will". And then yes, we might find that strange "concurrence" taking place in which our "will" becomes the same as the "Divine Will of God". Isn't that a wonderful thought.

These words given in Deuteronomy 30 as we close . . .

¹⁹ . . . today . . . I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life. (Deuteronomy 30:19)

Pray with me.