John 13:21-30 Commentary
New Revised Standard Version

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Study Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the *International Bible Study Commentary* website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the *International Bible Study Forum*.

(John 13:21) After saying this Jesus was troubled in spirit, and declared, "Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me."

Sometimes our greatest temptations come amid suffering, when we anticipate suffering or death, or when we suffer the loss of someone we love by death or in some other way. Sometimes our temptations are more severe when we suffer betrayal by a friend or someone we trusted with our deepest secret or with a treasured possession. In John 11:33, we learned that "When Jesus saw her [Mary] weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he

was greatly *disturbed* [troubled] in spirit and deeply moved." In the Greek New Testament, the same Greek word is translated into English as both "troubled" and "disturbed." Before Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, He was troubled by death and the suffering that someone's death caused those He loved, but He did not sin. When thinking of or being troubled about His own approaching death, Jesus did not sin. In John 12:27, we studied these words of Jesus as He thought about His coming hour of suffering, crucifixion, and death: "Now my soul is *troubled*. And what should I say—'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour." Jesus did not sin; rather, Jesus chose to do the will of His heavenly Father. Jesus knew that there was no other way for God to save the world and every believer in Jesus from sin.

As we will see, Jesus loved Judas, and when thinking about Judas' betrayal Jesus was troubled, but He did not sin. Learning how Jesus suffered in the many ways we suffer can encourage us when we read Hebrews 4:15-16, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." No matter what we experience or anticipate, no matter how much we suffer and feel troubled, we can go to Jesus who understands us, and He will give us the mercy, grace, and the help we need. Feeling

troubled in our spirit does not mean we lack faith. Jesus felt troubled, but He did not lack faith. When troubled, Jesus trusted His Father and His plan for His life—He did not sin. We can find help in Jesus and follow Jesus' example—we do not need to sin. When Jesus taught the disciples about His coming death in John 14:1, Jesus encouraged them and all who believe in Him, saying, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me." When we feel troubled, that does not mean we have sinned, or are sinning, or will sin. We can do what Jesus said. We can continue to "Believe in God and believe also in Jesus!"

Finally, though Jesus had talked about being betrayed before, Jesus still did not name the one who would betray Him. He loved Judas as He loved all His disciples. Jesus gave Judas every opportunity to repent and turn to Jesus for help to overcome his sin and temptations, but Jesus knew that Judas would choose to remain in the darkness rather than become a child of light. This too troubled Jesus, as all believers in Jesus feel troubled when those they love choose to continue in sin and refuse to trust in Jesus for salvation from sin.

(John 13:22) The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he was speaking.

Judas was so respected as their treasurer and fellow disciple that none of the disciples suspected Judas would betray their Master. Judas was so deceptive that none of

them knew Judas was a thief who stole from the common purse of contributions to meet the disciples' needs and to help the poor; otherwise, they would have suspected Judas almost immediately. John must have learned that Judas had been a thief after Judas betrayed Jesus (see John 12:6). No matter what Judas heard Jesus teach, Judas remained a thief. In John 10:10, Jesus described thieves in a way Judas surely understood (and perhaps He said this with a warning look at Judas as He spoke), saying, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy." Judas declined morally from stealing, to plotting the arrest of Jesus that led to His killing, to destroying himself after he regretted his betrayal of Jesus and what his betrayal had done to Jesus. Refusing to turn from sinning will almost inevitably lead to committing worse and even more degrading sins beyond our imagination unless we turn to Jesus Christ for help and salvation from sin. Christians know that the solution to sinning is turning to Jesus, and that is one reason they proclaim the good news about Jesus and His coming. The disciples saw Jesus love and honor each of them in Jesus' own wise way, so based on the way Jesus treated each of them with grace, compassion, and mercy, they did not suspect Judas would ever betray Jesus. As they looked at one another with questioning eyes, they could not be certain which of them Jesus might be speaking about in a way that disturbed all of them.

(John 13:23) One of his disciples—the one whom Jesus loved—was reclining next to him;

In Jesus' day, people reclined on cushions to eat. They reclined on their side, rested on their elbow, and used their other hand to eat. When the disciples ate together, one disciple reclined near Jesus' right side and another reclined near His left side (two places of honor). Remember, in Mark 10:37, James and John said to Jesus, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." The other disciples reclined next to and across from one another where they could see and hear Jesus teach. According to John's description, the one whom Jesus loved (probably John, the writer of this Gospel) would have reclined on Jesus' right, where they could quietly talk without needing to be face-to-face while they ate with their right hands. If both reclined on their left elbow, as was common, to eat with their right hand, as was common, John could have had his back to Jesus and be able to speak quietly with Jesus while they both conveniently ate. The KJV and the NASB describe John's position as "leaning on Jesus' bosom" or "reclining on Jesus' bosom." The NIV and NRSV describe John's position as "reclining next to him," which is the closest description of the way we know people ate at that time.

(John 13:24) Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking.

Peter was not seated next to Jesus, but he could see John and John could see Peter well enough to understand his hand motions and perhaps read his lips well enough to interpret something like, "Ask him who it is!"

(John 13:25) So while reclining next to Jesus, he asked him, "Lord, who is it?"

So, John quietly asked Jesus in a way that no one else could hear. He was close enough to Jesus for them to talk without being overheard.

(John 13:26) Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." So when he had dipped the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot.

Without speaking Judas' name aloud, Jesus told John what to look for to identify His betrayer. Interestingly, Jesus often spoke of himself as the bread of life, as essential to life: physical, mental, spiritual, and eternal life. But those who walk in darkness prefer only physical, mental, and material gratifications such as money and what money can buy. When Jesus spoke about His betrayer earlier in John 13:18, Jesus told His disciples, "I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But it is to fulfill the scripture, '*The one who ate my bread* has lifted his heel against me.'" As one of Jesus' closest disciples, Judas often ate bread with Jesus and all the disciples, and the sign that Jesus gave to John literally fulfilled Psalm 41:9 and John 13:18, for Jesus gave Judas a piece of bread to eat. Judas had to be close enough to receive his bread directly from Jesus' hand, and in that culture, it was a sign of love when Jesus honored Judas by

directly handing him a piece of food. As a sign of love for Judas, Jesus gave Judas a piece of bread, but Judas did not reciprocate with love for Jesus. As a sign to John that Judas would betray Him, Jesus gave Judas a piece of bread, which fulfilled Psalm 41:9 and Jesus' own prophecy in John 13:18. If Jesus had told the disciples about Judas where they all could hear, they would have restrained Judas, perhaps even killing him, but that was not God's plan.

(John 13:27) After he received the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, "Do quickly what you are going to do."

The place of honor on Jesus' left side probably went to the treasurer, Judas, where Jesus could easily give him a piece of bread, which usually expressed honor and love for someone. But during his three years with Jesus, in his heart Judas continually rejected Jesus' expressions of love for him. When Jesus taught about how to live in the Kingdom of God and spoke about His betrayal at this and previous times without naming Judas, He gave Judas opportunities to turn away from his love of money and stealing to ask Jesus to forgive him and help him do right. Judas proved to be an example of what Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 6:10, "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains." In Luke 16:13, Jesus had warned, "No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one

and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth." Judas had come to the point of no return, for despite all Jesus did for him and taught him, Judas began to hate and despise Jesus. Judas loved money and became devoted to wealth; therefore, he could not love and serve God. Judas' hour had finally come. His immoral character had become fully formed and Judas no longer desired the things the God. Judas preferred to live as a child of darkness. Whereas Judas chose to become a slave of wealth, he unknowingly became a slave of Satan. Therefore, with a piece of bread, Jesus gave Satan permission to enter Judas and Satan gave Judas the power to do what he wanted to do in his search for more wealth. Having committed himself to betraying Jesus, Jesus told Judas to go and quickly do what he wanted.

(John 13:28) Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him.

Without betraying the fact to the other disciples that Judas was His betrayer, Jesus may have told Judas to do something in a manner the disciples had seen before and probably with the words that Jesus had used before when He wanted something done. They thought nothing of Jesus giving Judas a piece of bread, but John knew why, and he eventually told Peter what Jesus said, did, and meant. As usual, Jesus knew that His disciples would understand later what He said, what it meant, and why He spoke to Judas as He did in the presence of them all.

(John 13:29) Some thought that, because Judas had the common purse, Jesus was telling him, "Buy what we need for the festival"; or, that he should give something to the poor.

Judas deceived all the disciples, but he did not deceive Jesus. The disciples never connected Judas with a possible betrayer. They immediately assumed that Judas was going out to do good; either quickly buying something for the Passover festival or quickly giving something to the poor (perhaps to someone that Jesus knew needed help immediately). They knew that Jesus often told Judas to perform these types of activities, but somehow in the performance of his duties Judas probably stole from the common purse.

(John 13:30) So, after receiving the piece of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.

After Satan entered Judas, he immediately went out. Jesus did not cause Satan to enter Judas, but similar to the LORD God giving Satan permission to test Job within certain restraints, so Jesus, the Son of God, gave Satan permission to empower and lead Judas to do what he wanted in fulfillment of Scripture. Tragically, Judas had refused to believe Jesus' teachings about the necessity of walking in the light so you will not stumble or fall in the darkness. In John 11:10, Jesus had warned, "But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them." Judas went out at night and he stumbled and fell because

the light (the Spirit and Truth of God) that he had rejected was not in him—Satan was within him.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. Why do you think Jesus was troubled in spirit?

2. Who do you think was "the one whom Jesus loved"?

3. How close was Judas sitting to Jesus?

4. What happened after Judas received the piece of bread?

5. What did Judas have and why did the disciples think Judas was leaving?

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