

Reality

John 13:18-38

Key Verse: 13:38

"Then Jesus answered, 'Will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!'"

Has anybody noticed that what you see in advertising is not quite what you get when you buy the product? Who has ever seen the phone commercials that show that particular company's phone as the greatest thing since the invention of the wheel? It's the commercial where the phone looks so slick with its big screen and powerful processor, but when you see the device, it looks cheaply made and flimsy. Who has ever seen that? Another classic is fast food ads. When was the last time what you bought at McDonald's that looked like the pictures? In the ads, the bun looks perfect, the tomato has little drops of water on it, the burger has excellent color, and the lettuce is a beautifully green leaf. However, when you buy the burger, the bun is smashed, you can't find the tomato, the burger is gray and the lettuce is shredded and barely green. In many cases, we accept that the reality of things is different than as advertised. We accept that reality so much that we start living our lives in that way. We may say many things, but the reality of who we are is different than what we actually say. In this passage, there are three main people. For two of those people, the reality of their lives is different than how things appeared. The third person is Jesus and he is as advertised. He's the only one who truly is.

I'm actually going to start a few verses back, starting at verse 14. "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill this passage of Scripture: 'He who shared my bread has turned against me.'" (14-18) Jesus had just humbled himself, washed his disciples' feet, and told them why he washed their feet. After that, Jesus wanted his disciples to do the same and he said that they would be blessed if they did them. Immediately after that, Jesus said that he was not referring to all of them. Sometimes it's hard to see the flow because of the NIV headings in the Bible, but in the original text, there is no header. The text just flows together, "Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill this passage of Scripture: 'He who shared my bread has turned against me.'" (17-18) This flow is significant because the mere act of mimicking Jesus is not enough to receive God's blessing. You can look good on the outside, but not have the right substance on the inside. Even at the beginning, here, you can see that in people the reality of a person can be different than what is projected outward.

Jesus is saying this because, as he mentions, someone who is very close to him will turn on him, and a little later, Jesus flat out says that someone is going to betray him (21). Betrayal is when someone close to you turns his back on you and becomes your enemy. Enemies cannot betray you; they are expected to try to cause you harm. That's why they are enemies. However, when someone close to you causes you harm, then you feel betrayed. Betrayal really hurts because the person who is betraying is very close to the person being betrayed. PFC Bradley Manning is accused of giving US Army secrets to the website Wikileaks. His trial began just this past week and if the allegations are true, then Private Manning will be convicted of betraying his country by making classified information available to the enemies of the United States. These allegations are very serious and, although it won't happen, the military has the option to pursue the death sentence. Betrayal to the military is that serious, and it is serious to Jesus as well. Verse 21 says that Jesus was troubled in spirit. You can see Jesus' humanity here. It really bothered Jesus that he was going to be betrayed and he told his disciples of the betrayal.

Now, why did Jesus bring this up? Why go through all the discomfort to tell everyone some troubling news? You and me tend to just ignore all the troubling things that go on around us. We prefer not to think about the things that upset us the most. When we see a horrible news report, we change the channel. When something is disturbing on the internet, we head on over to YouTube to find some funny video. We really don't like the things that make us feel uncomfortable, but Jesus goes out and tells his

disciples. Why? Jesus says, "I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am who I am. Very truly I tell you, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me" (19-20) Jesus wanted his disciples to know that he is God. Jesus wanted them to know who he was and that to accept him is to accept God. Who else but God knows what is going to happen? Who else but God knows the very hearts of men?

When Jesus talked about the betrayal, the disciples were at a loss of what to say. They just sat there and stared at each other wondering whom Jesus was talking about. Simon Peter motioned to John, who was sitting very close to Jesus, "Ask him which one he means." (24) And to this John asked Jesus who it was. Jesus was very straightforward. "Jesus answered, 'It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.' Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot." (26) With 2000 years of hindsight, it appears pretty obvious what Jesus was saying and doing. Jesus almost explicitly said that Judas was the betrayer. He said that it was the person who he gives a piece of bread to and then he hands some bread to Judas. From our point of view it seems very obvious. The author of this book John has mentioned Judas' betrayal before, but to the disciples at this time, they thought Judas was one of the most trusted men in Jesus' circle. Even after Jesus dipped the bread and gave it to Judas, they still didn't understand. They thought that when Judas left, he was going to get something for the festival or to give to the poor.

Judas had everyone convinced that he was a close follower. He was highly trusted because he was the keeper of the moneybag. He looked so pious, that when Mary poured the perfume on Jesus, he protested saying that the money could have been given to the poor. He looked like a good, caring guy who could be trusted with special tasks, but he would be the one who would betray Jesus. Judas would go out that night and hand Jesus over to the religious leaders, all for a bag of thirty silver coins. Why did Judas do this? While Judas was with Jesus, he was looking to receive something from Jesus. Judas was selfish and wanted some money for him and when he realized that Jesus would not give him what he wanted, Judas decided to betray Jesus. When Judas returned to Jesus later, he used his trusted position to get close to Jesus and betrayed him with a kiss. He didn't stand at a distance and point Jesus out to the guard; he came in close like a dear friend and kissed Jesus. He thought that he was so highly regarded that he could betray Jesus this way. He looked so splendid on the outside, but inside he was as rotten as a tomb.

While Judas plotted and schemed, while maintaining his quiet and trustworthy demeanor, Peter often would boast of what he would do. Even here, in this passage, we find Peter saying what he can't actually back up. After Judas left, Jesus talks about being glorified. He knew that his time was ending and that he would be crucified very soon. To that thought Jesus says to his disciples, "My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come." (33) Jesus was going back to God the Father and he was telling his disciples that they only had a limited time with him. And in his absence, Jesus tells them to love each other as a mark of being Jesus' disciple. (34-35) But after Jesus said this, Peter did not focus on loving his fellow disciples, he was curious to where Jesus was going. Unlike Judas, Peter actually loved Jesus, but he loved him as a friend, not as the great and powerful God. Peter, in the last passage, calls Jesus Lord but then goes ahead and tells Jesus what to do. That's the mark of a man who puts his own desires above that of others. He was not concerned about loving everyone else; he was interested in where Jesus was going. "Jesus replied, 'Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later.'" (36) Still, that wasn't enough for Peter, "Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." (37) Peter was so sure of himself that he said that he would lay down his life for Jesus. There was no doubt in Peter's mind that he would stand up for Jesus and be by his side through thick and thin. He was very confident of his ability to be there for Jesus.

However, Jesus cautions Peter, "Will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!" (38) Before the morning comes and the rooster crows, Peter would disown Jesus three times. Before the new day came, Peter would deny that he even

knew Jesus at all, even to a slave girl, a person of no significance. What Jesus said about Peter would come strikingly true. For all of Peter's promises and boastful sayings, he disowns Jesus to a slave girl in just a couple of hours from this point. It really shows the pride that Peter has. He was so certain of himself and said that he would always stand by Jesus, but in the end, Peter was puffed up bigger than he actually was. It's amazing to see how a person's mouth can write checks that their bodies cannot cash.

We might have a temptation to look at both these men and judge them as being foolish. Was Jesus' life really worth thirty silver coins? How could Peter be so sure of himself and not be able to back it up a couple of hours later? How could Judas look so good, like an angel of God, and yet plot to hand Jesus over to the people who want to kill him? We like to stand and judge these men and others who act like them, but, honestly, we are no different. There are probably people here who will betray Jesus. They will look so good, but in the end, when they do not get what they want, they will call Christianity a farce and a lie and they will walk away looking for something to satisfy their desires. These are the people who say that they have tried Christianity, but it doesn't work. They tried the prayers; they tried the works; they tried going to church, but none of it changed the way they were, so they think that it must not work and sever all ties. These people don't just dabble in Christianity they go headlong into it. They look like prayer warriors and the most faithful attendants, but they are only in it for themselves and when they do not receive what they want, they will simply abandon Jesus and even start to spit venom at him and the church. It has happened before and it will happen again. The reality of this type of person is that they are in it for themselves and when they do not get what they want, they will betray Jesus.

There are also people here who will say that they will always stand by Jesus, but when just the right hardship comes along, they too will turn their back on Jesus and worry more about themselves. These are the people who love Jesus when everything is good and speak very loudly about their faith when everything is going well. They may even be boastful when things are not going so well. In their hardships, they stand by Jesus and want to love him, but they ignore the very word that Jesus tried to give them because it did not mesh with their idea of whom Jesus should be. When confronted with their weakness, these people do not run to Christ, but their lives shut down and they do not talk about Jesus with anyone. In fact, they may use euphemisms about their lives or deny Jesus totally, like Peter did. The reality of this sort of person is that are unable to see his or her own limitations. They boast about what they will do, but when the right circumstances come along, they will fall flat on their faces.

Each and every person will fall into one of these two camps, and if you think that you do not fit into one of these two camps, then you are like Peter and very soon you too will succumb to your fear and deny Jesus to someone insignificant. None of us are the hero who will stick with Jesus through everything. It is not in our nature to be like that. We are sinners and because we are sinners, we will sin. There is no way around it. I fall into the Peter camp. I like to say that I will do a lot. I will finish the posters. I will write the message. I will help plan. I like being a man of my word. If I say that I will do something then I will try with all of my might to be able to do so, but unfortunately, there are many times where I fall flat on my face. Every so often, I have bouts of depression. For all my promises, when one of these bouts comes, I am entirely ineffective and shut down. I don't live like someone who is following Jesus. I fall very short of the expectation that I have for myself. I become overwhelmed at everything that is going on and I just shut down. I am very ashamed to talk about it, but it is very much like what happened to Peter. He was so sure of himself, but when overwhelming odds came on him, he clammed up and ran off. He then denied that he even knew Jesus.

It sounds kind of bad that we will either not get what we want from Jesus and betray him, like Judas, or we will fall flat on our faces when faced with overwhelming odds, like Peter. That sounds like a very bad place to be and so depressing, but it is the reality of whom we are. Is there any hope for us, then? The wonderful thing is that there is so much hope in Jesus. In the midst of all the sin and betrayal in the passage, there is Jesus. Jesus told the disciples about the betrayal because he wanted them to know who he was. Jesus is the only authentic person in this passage. Only Jesus is who he seems he is. Jesus does not promise things that he cannot deliver. He knows the very hearts of men and he knows

what is going to happen. Jesus is God and he is going to die on the cross for the sins of all humanity. When Jesus talks about himself in the passage, he is also talking about God the Father. Jesus has this intertwined relationship with God the Father that when you see one, you see the other. In this passage, Jesus says, "...whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me." (20) And when speaking about his crucifixion and the glory to come, "Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once." (31-32) Jesus has this fundamental relationship with the Father and that connection is who Jesus is. Jesus said, "I and the Father are one." (John 10:30) You cannot separate Jesus from the Father, just like you cannot separate white from rice. It is part of his identity. So when someone accepts Jesus, someone also accepts the Father. And when Jesus is glorified, the Father is glorified. When the Father is glorified, Jesus is glorified. There is this deep and connected relationship.

The wonderful thing is that Jesus wants for us to have the same relationship with him. That is where our hope lies. He knows that we are unable to function on our own. He knows that we will fall flat on our faces or outright betray him. Jesus already knows it, but the great thing is that Jesus came and died so that we could be forgiven of our sins and be reunited with him in our lives. We have to rely on Jesus. On our own, we will fail, but with Jesus we have the strength to endure. We can overcome hardships by relying on the strength of our God. We can overcome shame and failure and be restored by the power of Christ. Both Judas and Peter realized their weakness and both felt so much shame at their actions. Judas threw the bag of coins back at the religious leaders, but in his regret for his actions, he killed himself in a field. After Peter denied Jesus three times, he realized what Jesus said about him was true and he broke down and wept. After Jesus rose from the dead, he confronted Peter about what had happened. Jesus asked Peter whether he loved him, and Peter was no longer filled with boasting. His heart was broken and through repentance, he was restored to Jesus, so much so that he was never the same again. Peter developed a relationship with Jesus that was very similar to that which Jesus has with the Father. When you read about Peter in the book of Acts, he is a very different person from the prideful man we see in this passage. Through his relationship with Jesus, Peter becomes a lot like Jesus in the way he speaks and even being able to heal people. When faced with his own death, Peter does not deny his faith, but stands firmly in his faith. Even preaching to those who are trying to kill him. It is a vast difference from the man who couldn't even say he knew Jesus to a slave girl.

I am certain that each of us has been either like Judas or like Peter. We have either failed Jesus because of our weakness or betrayed Jesus for our own desires. The failure and betrayal can be outright verbally like we see in this passage or it can be more subtle, like simply saying that we are Christian and not living our lives like we are. One example is the very command that Jesus gives in the passage, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (34-35) Jesus says that the Christian community is denoted by the love that believers have for one another. It is the same love that Jesus shows his own disciples. The love that Jesus shows for us is to be the love that we show to each other in the body of Christ. However, very often we do not feel like loving another Christian because they have done something wrong. We ridicule them because they do not live the same way we live. We think that they are not authentic Christians because they raise their hands when they sing or because they don't raise their hands when they sing. On our own we can't love each other, we get on each other's nerves, but it is through Christ that we are able to. We will fail, but in Christ there is forgiveness and hope and the ability to love.

It is a hard reality to take. We like to think better of ourselves. We like to view ourselves in the most favorable light, but the reality is we are a mess. We look in the mirror and see the best person in the world, but in reality we are a frightful mess. We are the squished, gray meat patty with questionable toppings, not the beautiful delicious burger. The wonderful thing is that even though we are like this, we are not without hope. Jesus comes and he does reveal the reality of our lives, but by revealing the reality, he is opening the door for us to come to him, to be like him, to surrender to him, and to have the deep and lasting relationship with him. He becomes our source of power. Jesus becomes our identity and we

cannot separate that from our lives just like Jesus cannot separate the identity of the Father from his life. In our failures and in our betrayals we have an option to despair and even kill ourselves, like Judas did or we can return to Jesus, repent of our weakness and our lack of desire, and be healed and made whole. I have so many weaknesses, but through Jesus I don't have to worry about them. I don't have to make promises that I cannot keep. In Jesus, we are able to be so much more than we can ever imagine. Because of who Jesus is and his faithfulness to us, we are not stuck being who we really are. Our reality changes because of Jesus.