

God's Sovereignty over Evil, Sin, and Mean People

John 13:18-30

Introduction: A couple of weeks ago we began a sermon series on John 13-17. These chapters record the things that Jesus did, said, and prayed on the night before His crucifixion. The words that Jesus communicated on this night are not more true than any of His other teachings, however, they do carry a special kind of significance since they are some of His last words. Today we are going to examine what had to be one of the most heart-wrenching experiences in Jesus' earthly life: His betrayal by Judas.

Opening Discussion: If you know anything about John 13-17, what are you looking forward to about studying it over the next few weeks?

Read John 13:18-30

1. Why did Jesus tell his disciples that He was going to be betrayed (v. 18-19)? How might hearing this from Jesus before it actually happened help the disciples?

2. When Jesus begins to tell His disciples that one of them will betray Him, it says that he "became troubled in spirit" (v. 21). What does it mean to be troubled in spirit? What is your sense about what Jesus was experiencing at this moment?

3. How do the disciples respond? And what does this suggest about how they had experienced Judas up to this time?

4. In what ways do we see Jesus willingly submitting to God's sovereign plan in this passage?

Steve said:

I'd like you to identify a circumstance or a relationship in which you need to trust in the sovereignty of God. Have you experienced betrayal in a friendship, in a marriage, in the church, in the workplace? Have you been the victim of people who have done evil things to you or to someone you love? Or maybe for you it's more a matter of being around mean people who say and do things that are hurtful to you. When we experience some obvious blessing or when people are kind and gracious to us, it's easy to say, "God is good and sovereign." But how do we trust that God is sovereign when we experience evil, sin, and mean people?

5. Do you have a circumstance or a relationship that comes to mind in which you need to trust in the sovereignty of God?

By way of application, Steve said that Jesus' experience with Judas suggests three responses from us: (1) Don't be afraid of being "troubled in spirit"; (2) Consider how God is refining you; and, (3) Seek opportunities to "love your enemies."

Steve said:

First, don't be afraid of being "troubled in spirit." We read in verse 21 that as Jesus declared, ". . . one of you will betray Me," that "He became troubled in spirit." Jesus felt the full weight of the evil that He was about to experience. He didn't keep a stiff upper lip; He didn't try to "keep it together" for the disciples. No, He became troubled in spirit. This was evidence of His spiritual health and wholeness. He didn't try to cover up or hide from His pain; He faced it head-on. You and I are Christlike when we are troubled in spirit over the things that grieve the heart of God. When we experience things that are troubling, it's appropriate to be troubled in spirit (which is different from being angry or anxious). It is a sign of spiritual health when our emotions reflect spiritual realities.

6. When you experience troubling things do you tend to keep a "stiff upper lip" or do you allow yourself to feel the pain?
7. Why is it allowing ourselves to feel the pain of evil a sign of spiritual health?
8. If we can learn to pause and reflect on how God might be refining us through a difficult person or circumstance, how might that help us trust in His sovereignty?

Steve said:

Third, seek opportunities to "love your enemies." Few things say to God, "I trust that You are sovereign," like loving your enemies - people who've betrayed you, persecuted you, been mean to you, etc. After being betrayed, Jesus loved His enemies by praying for them ("Father forgive them. . ."), by speaking truth to them, and ultimately by dying for them ("While we were God's enemies Christ died for us."). Of course Jesus tells us to love our enemies as well. This is a basic aspect of being "Christlike." . . . As an expression of Christlikeness, I'd like you to consider the possibility of actively, intentionally loving someone who has sinned against you. This will look different for different circumstances. But if God is prompting you to love your enemy, don't ignore it.

9. Do you have an "enemy" that God is prompting you to love? If so, what might it look like to love him or her?