

**“Him Who Betrays Me” (Luke 22:2–6, 21–23)**

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One of those questions people from all times and places have asked is: Why did this happen? We may ask that when someone we know unexpectedly dies at an early age. Why did she die so young? We may ask that when we look at the news and see a report of a war or a natural disaster or a terrorist attack. Why do people kill each other? Why did such a devastating earthquake happen? We may ask a similar question if something bad happens in our life. Why did that happen to my child? Why did my spouse get cancer?

And if we believe in God, we inevitably draw him into these questions. We wonder why God would allow evil, which can be defined as whatever causes the world to be the way it shouldn't be. We have a sense that something is wrong, and we start to ask why that such a wrong thing should exist. The problem of evil can be formulated in many ways, but it's basically expressed in these kinds of questions: If God is omnipotent, omniscient, and loving, why is there any evil at all? If God is omnipotent, omniscient, and loving, why is there so much evil? If God is all powerful, if he knows how to prevent evil, and if he's truly loving and cares, then why is there such horrific acts of evil? If God is real, why did this particular evil event occur? If God loves me, if he has all the power that's possible, why did this evil thing happen to me? How we answer those questions has everything to do with what we believe about God and this world that he has made.

We're going to think about such questions today as we continue to look at the life of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke. Today, we're going to consider some verses that talk about how one of Jesus' followers, one of the twelve disciples, arranged to betray Jesus. Jesus was aware that this was going to happen. He said it was determined by God. Yet he also said that those who commit evil are responsible for their sin.

We'll begin by reading the first two verses of Luke 22. As you turn there, I want to remind you that the Gospel of Luke is a biography about Jesus. Like the other Gospel writers, Luke spends quite a bit of time detailing the days leading up to Jesus' death. That's because Jesus' death and the events that led up to it are so important. This is Thursday, the day before Jesus will die. Jesus is with his disciples in Jerusalem.

Let's now read Luke 22:1–2:

<sup>1</sup> Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called the Passover.  
<sup>2</sup> And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to put him to death, for they feared the people.<sup>1</sup>

Why do the chief priests and scribes, some of the most prominent Jewish leaders, want to kill Jesus? And why does Luke tell us that they feared the people? They wanted to get rid of Jesus because they didn't like what he was teaching. In John's Gospel, we find out that they had long wanted to kill Jesus because he was challenging their religious customs and, more importantly, because he was making himself appear equal to God (John 5:18; 8:58–59; 10:30–31). Jesus taught in many ways that he is divine, that he is in fact the Son of God. The Jewish people did not yet realize that God is triune, that there is one God in three persons: Father, Son, and Spirit. They didn't realize that God the Father sent God the Son to become a human being. They didn't think this was possible. They thought Jesus was lying. They thought he might actually be demon-possessed (John 7:20; 8:48). They certainly knew that he was a threat, and that he had to go.

But the Jewish leaders were afraid of what the crowd might do if they arrested Jesus in public. Jesus continued to gather crowds to himself. No one ever spoke like he did. No one was able to perform all the miracles that he performed. There was simply no one like him. Many people found hope in Jesus. Some were just fascinated by him. Jerusalem was full of people during the time of Passover, as Jewish pilgrims came from afar to celebrate the feast in their holy city. If Jesus was arrested in the city, there would be backlash, probably a riot. A riot would likely lead to some terrible consequences. The Jews lived under Roman rule. The Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, was charged with maintaining order. If a riot broke out in the city, Roman soldiers would put an end to it in a violent fashion. The Jewish leaders might be removed from their positions. So, they had to find a way to get Jesus killed without stirring up a riot.

One of the reasons why Jesus died is because people did not believe that he is God. They thought he was committing blasphemy. They rejected him. But there are other reasons why Jesus died. Another reason is that Satan, the devil, wanted to thwart God's plans. Satan is a mysterious, shadowy figure. Jesus himself called him a "murderer" and "a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). We might call him the very embodiment of evil. He's no match for God—he's not omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient—but he's more powerful than mere humans. Satan

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

tried to stop Jesus by tempting him (Luke 4:1–13). But Jesus, the perfect man, never sinned. He resisted Satan’s temptation. Satan continued his attack through the Jewish leaders who tried to trap Jesus in his own words. Jesus called them the devil’s children (John 8:44). But Jesus resisted all their traps. And now, Satan sees another opportunity. He will get Jesus through one of his followers.

Let’s read verses 3–6:

<sup>3</sup> Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve. <sup>4</sup> He went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray him to them. <sup>5</sup> And they were glad, and agreed to give him money. <sup>6</sup> So he consented and sought an opportunity to betray him to them in the absence of a crowd.

We’re told that Satan “entered into” one of Jesus’ twelve disciples, Judas Iscariot. What does this mean? This kind of language, of Satan actually entering a person, is rare in the Bible. In fact, as far as I’m aware, this is the only time that we’re told Satan did this. We’re told that other people were demon-possessed while Jesus was on the Earth. But we’re not told that Satan himself entered into them.

While it’s not clear what it means for Satan to enter into Judas, it doesn’t mean that Judas was no longer responsible for his actions, as we’ll see. I don’t think it means that he went into some kind of zombie-like trance, becoming an entirely different person. Judas was still Judas, still responsible for his actions. But he was under the very strong influence of the devil in a way that is unique. In his own Gospel, John says that Satan “put it into [Judas’s] heart . . . to betray” Jesus (John 13:2). Satan likely thought that if Jesus were put to death, that would be the end of him, that God’s plans would be thwarted. But Satan didn’t know the future. He didn’t understand that God would use him for his own wonderful plan.

So, Satan strongly influenced Judas to conspire with the Jewish leaders. They gave him money, and he would tell them how to arrest Jesus “in the absence of a crowd.”

A couple of weeks ago, we looked at the verses that come next, which discuss how Jesus prepared to have one final Passover meal, one “last supper” with his disciples. We also looked at the what happened at that meal, how Jesus said that the elements of the meal—the bread and wine—would represent his body broken and his blood shed in order to initiate a new covenant with his people. Jesus knew that he would soon be put to death. He had already predicted his

death several times (Luke 9:21–22, 44; 18:31–33). Jesus knew that he, the Son of God, became a human in order to die for the sins of his people.

Right after the verses we looked at two weeks ago, which told of him eating this last, intimate meal with his followers, teaching them the meaning of his impending death, something strange happens. Jesus tells them that he knows that one of his followers would betray him. Look at verses 21–23:

<sup>21</sup> But behold, the hand of him who betrays me is with me on the table. <sup>22</sup> For the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!” <sup>23</sup> And they began to question one another, which of them it could be who was going to do this.

Jesus knew that one of them was his betrayer. Did Jesus know that it was Judas? Luke doesn't tell us that, but John does. Well before he died, Jesus seems to indicate that Judas is “a devil.” (See John 6:70–71). It's possible to believe that Jesus only knew that one of his disciples would betray him, and not specifically that Judas would betray him. But in John's Gospel, Jesus clearly identifies Judas as the one who will betray him, and when Satan enters into Judas, Jesus turns to him and says, “What you are going to do, do quickly” (John 13:21–27). Jesus knew what would happen.

In fact, Jesus said that what would happen to him, the Son of Man, was ordained by God. He says that he “goes as it has been determined.” All that was happening to Jesus was God's plan. But that doesn't mean that Satan knew that, or that Judas knew that, or that the Jewish leaders or the Roman officers and soldiers knew that. They were all acting according to God's plan, but they were still responsible for their sins. What God meant for good, they simply meant for evil (Gen. 50:20). Their purpose was to harm Jesus, not to bring about good through his death. So, Jesus says that though he would “go” according to God's plan, “woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!” That's basically a way of warning that the person who betrays Jesus will be condemned.

How can it be that God has a plan that uses evil, and that those who commit evil are still responsible for their sins?

Well, we must realize first that many Christians wouldn't agree with what I just said. They don't think God planned everything. Some people think that God simply knows in advance all that would happen. But that's not the language Jesus uses. He doesn't say that the Son of Man goes as it has been foreknown. He says that he goes as it has been determined—determined by

God. (That God is not mentioned is typical. This is an example of the “divine passive.” An action is put in the passive voice that we understand to be God’s action.

Other people think that God can’t truly foreknow the future because the future hasn’t happened yet. God knows everything possible, but it’s not possible to know something that doesn’t yet exist. But Jesus makes specific predictions about the future actions of people. He knows what Judas will do. Judas chose to do something, under the very strong influence of Satan, and yet still this was all part of God’s plan.

The way that we view these events has everything to do with the way that we understand God’s relationship to evil. And how we understand God’s relationship to evil has everything to do with what we think about God and what we think about the world he has made. I’ve been doing quite a bit of reading about the problem of evil, and I want to quote from one Christian theologian and philosopher named Paul Helm. This is what he writes:

When there is a theological or philosophical debate about God and personal evil and how it is to be addressed, it must not be taken for granted that there is agreement about everything else except the matter in question. . . . If one has a concept of God as a Mr. Fixit . . . , then that person’s approach to God’s relation to personal evil will *necessarily* be different from that of someone who thinks of God as the transcendent and yet immanent Creator, the ground of being whose thoughts are not our thoughts and whose ways are not our ways. . . .

Similarly, someone who thinks that the universe is arranged principally for our benefit, or even for one’s own individual benefit, will *necessarily* have a different approach to the justification of personal evil than someone who believes about that “of him and to him and through him are all things” [Rom. 11:36]. . . . Someone whose attitude to personal evil presupposes that the death of our bodies is the terminus of life will *necessarily* approach the evaluating of that evil differently from someone who looks forward to the life everlasting.<sup>2</sup>

What he is saying is basically that our worldview shapes how we view evil. Is this life all there is, or does this life precede a life that never ends? Is there a God who is in charge of the universe? If so, what is this God like? Is he our cosmic butler, a doting grandfather, a “Mr. Fixit”? Or is he a God whose ways are not our ways, who has revealed himself yet who also has plans that are beyond our full understanding? Does the universe exist for primarily for us or for God? Is the goal of this life what we think of as happiness or is the goal of this life to know our

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Helm, “God’s Providence Takes No Risks,” in *The Problem of Evil: Selected Readings*, ed. Michael L. Peterson, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017), 345–46.

Maker and to have a right relationship with him? How we answer these questions will shape how we view evil and God's relationship to it.

The Bible clearly teaches that God is a transcendent God who is all-powerful, that he molds and shapes his creation in the way that he sees fit, according to his purposes. He has revealed much of his purposes, but not all. We know in part, not in full. There are certainly some mysteries about God and his ways. God made everything for his glory, to demonstrate his greatness. He also made everything because he simply is creating. God's love knows no bounds, and it seems that his creation is an extension of his love. But the Bible presents God as one who is making a plan for his purposes, not primarily for ours. Yet since God is inherently good, his purposes are good. His overall plan is good. Yet, strangely, his plan contains evil. God doesn't perform the evil, so he is not the author of sin. And there is only evil because evil is the only way to gain some greater goods, goods that aren't possible without first there being any evil.

For example, we might say that things like bravery, overcoming adversity, and being victorious are all great goods. But they aren't possible without there first being some kind of evil. If there's no evil, no threat of harm and even death, there's no bravery. If there's no evil, there's no triumph over evil. If there were no sin, the Son of God wouldn't need to become a human being. The reason why Jesus came was to "save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). If the first human beings never sinned, and if all subsequent human beings never sinned, then Jesus wouldn't need to become a human being. There would be no need for him to live the perfect life that we don't live, thus fulfilling God's plans for humanity, because we would already be living perfect lives. If we were living perfect lives, we would love God as we should. We would desire to know him and please him through the way we lived. If we lived perfect lives, we would love each other as we should. We wouldn't be selfish and greedy. We wouldn't hate other people. And we wouldn't ignore or reject God. But the fact is, quite clearly, we're not perfect. God desires to have perfect human beings. That's his plan. And part of the reason Jesus came is to fulfill that plan.

Because God became a human being, God can better relate to his people. He knows what it's like to be a human. That's a great good that couldn't come without sin. And because God became a human being, we can better understand what God is like. God isn't some mysterious being that we can't see or imagine. People who saw Jesus had a clearer picture of what God is

like, because Jesus is the clearest revelation of God (Heb. 1:1–3). And we have access to what Jesus is like in the Bible.

But Jesus didn't just come to live. He also came to die. He did that because God cannot tolerate evil actions. He can't tolerate sin. As a perfect judge, he must have sin punished. You wouldn't think highly of a human judge who had all the evidence before him, who could see that a certain person was guilty, and yet who swept all that evidence under the rug and let that guilty person go free. If you wouldn't expect a human judge to do that, you shouldn't expect the perfect divine judge to do that. So, God must punish sin. And sin is so heinously evil that it must be destroyed. It must be crushed. Sinners must be killed.

But God is gracious. He allowed for a substitute to come, someone to take the punishment that we deserve for sin. God the Father sent God the Son to die in place of all who would trust him. And God the Son came willingly to die, to lay down his life for his people. He takes their sin and receives the full penalty for that sin by dying on the cross. He was treated horribly, tortured and killed in a slow and painful way. But he also absorbed a spiritual punishment because what we can comprehend. Jesus takes the wrath of God, experiencing hell on earth, so that all who come to him in faith don't have to experience that terrible reality.

And Jesus' death—and his subsequent resurrection—are also great goods that couldn't come without there first being evil. Obviously, it's good for sinners to have a way to be forgiven. But Jesus' death shows us how much God loves us. Jesus' death teaches us the importance of sacrifice. And his resurrection is a great triumph. Without evil, there is no victory. There's no great story of bravery and sacrifice. But with evil, there's the greatest story ever told.

So, Jesus had to die. And someone had to kill Jesus. Many people had to plot Jesus' death. The Jewish leaders, Judas, Satan, Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor who was too cowardly to release a man he believed to be innocent, the Roman soldiers who crucified Jesus—all these individuals were part of God's plan, though they didn't know it. And we are part of God's plan, too. Jesus died because our sin, the sin of all humanity, required it.

But just because we're part of God's plan doesn't mean our sin isn't evil, and that we're not responsible for our sin. Verse 22 of this passage makes it clear that God is in charge of all that happens, but also that those who commit evil are held responsible for their sin. The reason that is so is because people willingly commit sin. Judas betrayed Jesus willingly, even if he was

under the influence of Satan. And we all pursue our own desires and commit sins. It won't do for us to complain to God that we can't help it.

I want to drop an interesting footnote here. About fifteen years ago, a somewhat recently discovered ancient manuscript, the so-called *Gospel of Judas*, was finally translated into English. This Gospel portrays Judas as a hero, Jesus' favorite disciple. Jesus secretly approached Judas and told him to betray him so that he would die. However, this is not the truth. This so-called "lost gospel" wasn't really lost. It was most likely written in the second half of the second century, a hundred years or more after Luke wrote his Gospel, long after all those who witnessed Jesus had died. In the year 180, the Christian theologian Irenaeus dismissed the *Gospel of Judas* as fictitious history.<sup>3</sup> Strangely, there was a group of people called the Cainites who wrote stories about the villains of the Bible, like Cain and Judas. These people claimed that these villains were actually the real heroes of the Bible. After the *Gospel of Judas* was published in English translation in 2006, Adam Gopnik wrote a review of it in *The New Yorker*. He said that these gospels "no more challenge the basis of the Church's faith than the discovery of a document from the nineteenth century written in Ohio and defending King George would be a challenge to the basis of American democracy."<sup>4</sup>

So, Judas was not a hero. He did evil. In fact, we can say he participated in the greatest evil, killing the Son of God. I know many people would say that there have been greater evils than Jesus' death. We have to admit that it's hard to weigh acts of evil. How can we compare the Holocaust with the institution of slavery? Or, how can we compare the Holocaust with the abortion of tens of millions of unborn human beings each year? Even in America, there has been approximately 60 million abortions committed over the last forty-seven years, since *Roe v. Wade* was decided. We know scientifically that what is in the womb, whether it's called a baby or a fetus, is a human life. That being is alive, and he or she has his or her own DNA and body, regardless of how small, how underdeveloped, and how dependent he or she is on the mother. We know these things from science, and yet we still allow the great evil of abortion to occur. At any rate, there are many evils that have been committed throughout history, and some of them quite grave, yet I think a case can be made that the greatest evil was the murder of Jesus. He was truly innocent, in a way that no other human being was innocent, because he never sinned. And

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<sup>3</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.31.1.

<sup>4</sup> Adam Gopnik, "Jesus Laughed," *The New Yorker*, April 17, 2006, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2006/04/17/jesus-laughed> (accessed December 13, 2014).



he was and is truly God. If God is the greatest being, if all of reality is God-centered, then putting the God-man to death is the greatest evil.

And, yet, we know that Jesus died according to God's plan. That is made clear also in Luke's sequel, the book of Acts (see Acts 2:23; 3:18; 4:27–28). So, if the greatest evil went according to God's plan, and if God works all things according to his will (Eph. 1:11), even determining the outcomes of what we would consider chance events (Prov. 16:33), then we can see that no evil is outside of God's plans. Yet he works evil for good. Out of evil come things like bravery and victory, but also humility and spiritual growth, and many other things besides.

I know that all of this is hard to accept. Yet if we stopped and thought about it, all of us should be thankful for evil. I got this idea from another Christian philosopher, William Hasker.<sup>5</sup> Basically, he says that most people are glad that they exist. Yet most of us likely wouldn't exist were it not for great evils in the world. War is a great evil, and many people die in wars. That is certainly true of World War II. Millions of people died in World War II, including over 400,000 Americans. My parents were born in New Jersey, rather close to New York City, shortly after the war ended. My mother was born at the end of 1946. My father was born in the middle of 1948. They met in high school, started dating, went to college together at Gordon College and married before they graduated. And I owe my existence to them. But it's easy to imagine that if there were no World War II, I might not be alive. Both of my grandfathers served in the military during the war. They were married to my grandmothers before the war, and then they came back home and made babies. I imagine that there were men from that part of New Jersey who went off to war and were killed. They might have been married already, or perhaps might have married after coming back home, but they died. What if there was no war, and those men who went and died married and had children who were approximately the ages of my parents? What if that man had a son my mother's age, and what if my mother met that son and fell in love with him instead of my father? Or what if that man had a daughter who met my father and married him? Or what if both happened? If any of that occurred, my parents wouldn't have married each other. They wouldn't have had my brothers and me. And I wouldn't exist.

Now, that's just one war. Imagine if World War I didn't happen, and the Civil War. Imagine how different the population of American would be, not just in size, but in composition.

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<sup>5</sup> William Hasker, "On Regretting the Evils of This World," in *The Problem of Evil: Selected Readings*, ed. Michael L. Peterson, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017).

Now think about all kinds of wars and genocides and natural disasters. If those didn't occur, many people who now are alive wouldn't exist. Other people would be alive, perhaps far more people, but we wouldn't be here.

That's not a full answer to the problem of evil. But it gives us a different perspective on it. The reality is that every event that occurs is interconnected with every other event in ways that we don't understand. This is basically what is called "the butterfly effect." Since we don't understand how evil leads to good doesn't mean that it can't happen. It has happened. And the greatest example of God using evil for good is the death of his Son.

So, though we may not understand why evil has occurred, we can trust that God is in control, and that his purposes are good. The greatest example of his goodness and his love, even in the face of evil, is the death of Jesus. Though evil people plotted against Jesus, and though the devil helped bring it about, it was God's plan. In fact, we can say that it was through the death of Jesus that God trapped Satan. Satan was hanged with his own noose. God brings about the death of evil through evil.

The death of Jesus shows us that though God is in control of evil, he isn't cold and distant. God knows what it's like to experience evil firsthand. The Son of God was mocked, srejected, betrayed, arrested, tortured, and killed. Jesus knows what it's like to be born, to grow up, to be hungry and thirsty and tired, to have people ridicule him, to have his friends desert him. He knows what it's like to be lonely and forsaken. And he knows what it's like to die. God can relate to us in our suffering because he has suffered. And even this was all part of God's plan.

The lesson for us is to know that God is in charge, and to know that he has a plan that includes evil and defeats evil. That center of that plan is Jesus. The plan hasn't been completed just yet. There's obviously still evil in the world. When Jesus comes again, evil will be pulled up by its long roots and destroyed. In the meantime, we must trust God. We don't have to understand all the mysteries of evil. Only God knows them. But we must trust God. When evil comes our way, it is intended for our good. We don't have to like evil and suffering. No one does. But we must cling to God and trust he has a reason for it. If possible, we must work against evil. The fact that God is in charge doesn't mean we should be passive. He teaches us to fight against oppression, to expose evil, to help those who are suffering. Our fighting against evil is also part of God's plan, and it helps us become the kind of people that God wants us to be. But our best efforts will not destroy evil. Only Jesus can do that. And Jesus died to destroy the evil

that lurks within us, to take it upon his shoulders and crush it. A God who is in control, and a God who would sacrifice himself for us, is a God worth trusting, even when we don't understand.

I urge us all to trust Jesus. He is the only way to escape evil. And if we trust in Jesus, we can trust that every evil we've experienced will turn out for our good. As Paul writes in Romans 8:28, "we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."