

## **‘Stick with me, distracted disciples’**

**Luke 22:1-6, 20-38**

This meal mattered to Jesus. It was the last one He'd have with them, at least in this world. There was so much He wanted to tell them, so much He needed to pass on. They were His pride and joy, this team of disciples. He'd basically raised them as God's children. They were so different now from when He'd first found them.

But time was running out. They were still so young in their faith in Him, still so green. Soon, Jesus would be dead. And their heads were going to spin with it. Things were about to get tough for these disciples. They needed to listen up to what Jesus had to share with them in this final team talk.

We looked at the Lord's Supper passage in Luke 22 last week in our communion breakfast. As we look in vv.1-6 and 20-38 about what was said and done around that meal, we hear Jesus pouring out His heart as a leader giving parting words to the family of followers He loved.

But through it all there was just that sense that... well, they weren't really *listening*. These disciples were just too *distracted*, and it was kind of heartbreaking, because Jesus was telling them some really important things that they would need for what was next. You can almost sense Jesus' loneliness in a passage where His people are caught up with sin, betrayal, denial, self-concern and lots of missing the point.

In vv.1-6, we read about *getting distracted by sin*. Both Judas, and the religious authorities that he does a deadly deal with. They all go down a road of rebellion against God. Now, Judas and the authorities don't *think* they're doing that. But what they learn the hard way is that to rebel against *Jesus* is to rebel against God.

Judas and the Jewish leaders think Jesus is dangerous, mistaken, a force in society that's going to make things *worse*, not better. So they make a move against Him. But that's sin. And this rebellion against Jesus has got all the hallmarks of sin. It's done in the shadows. When we're going against Jesus and His lead, we do it quietly. Where nobody can see, or only those that we trust to join in the secret.

Nobody pulls out the porn in their youth group, or chats at church about how to tax dodge. Sin comes to life in the shadows, when we let ourselves wander into those places unchecked and unnoticed. Where are the shadow

places you need to watch out for? A corner at school or uni away from public view? Your desk and computer at work or at home? Who are the co-conspirators that lead you to rebel against Jesus? What are you going to do to avoid being alone with them and distracted by sin?

Sin also likes to blame someone else. It's as old as the story of sin itself. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve hid. And then, when they were found, they blamed someone else. The authorities must have loved having Judas on board. Someone they could point to. 'It was this man who led us to Jesus, it's *his* testimony that condemns Him.' And Judas must have found comfort in this thought: 'I only showed them where He was. What they *do* to Him - that's not on me.'

The broken relationship that says 'I only behaved like this because they behaved like that.' The less-than-honest behaviour at work that says 'that's just how things work around here.' When you're getting distracted by sin, you'll justify it - you'll find someone else to point to and say, 'it was their influence... I was only standing in the same place, that's all...'

Sin doesn't like to admit guilt. Which makes it hard to repent - to turn around and come back to Jesus, which is, of course, the answer to all this. Judas and the religious leaders didn't do that.

*Silent reflection - Where am I doing things in the shadows and blaming other people for it?*

Darrell Bock writes: 'There came a day when Judas said that Jesus was not the answer.' And that's what led to Judas becoming a *disciple distracted by betrayal*. In Peter's case, in vv.31-34, he was to become a *disciple distracted by denial*. So what's the difference between Judas' betrayal of Jesus, and Peter's denial of Him?

Well, let's start with what they have in common. First of all, *Satan is behind both*. In v.3, we read that Satan's influence was there in Judas' traitorous actions. And in v.31, Jesus explains that Satan is at work in the shaking of faith that Peter (and the other disciples) will experience.

I've heard from one or two folks this week that there's that sense of our church being under spiritual attack. Now, I've been here just enough years to observe that this keeps coming up in January or February, when the days are cold, the nights are long and everyone's miserable. I don't mean to sound too

sceptical, nor doubt that spiritual attack *might* be happening - but I think it's wise to identify where spiritual attack is *certainly* happening.

And this passage reminds us that it's where faith is faltering. Satan loves to use defection from within as a way to bring down the church. It's his oldest trick, actually. If he could bring down Eve, he'd take Adam down too. If he can bring a joyful Christian down to the point of denying Jesus, he could shake their church down with them. Where disciples who have walked with the Son of God start saying, 'I'm not with Jesus,' you can be sure that the devil's at work.

The second thing that Judas and Peter have in common is that *Jesus sees their failures of faith coming*. In vv.21-22 the room suddenly feels a lot smaller and hotter for Judas when Jesus tells them all 'I know one of you breaking bread with me is going to betray me.' In v.34 Jesus tells Peter, in front of all their friends, 'You're going to say you don't know me.'

There's nothing that the devil can pull, or that you can do, that Jesus doesn't see coming. In Peter's case, that turns out to be a wonderfully reassuring thing as Jesus talks about Peter being restored some day. But in Judas' case, it turns out to be a solemn and dreadful tone ringing in his ears. Why the difference? Because of the *differences* between Judas' betrayal, and Peter's denial.

Judas' action is a decisive rejection of Jesus. He is saying, 'Jesus is absolutely *not* who He says He is. He is *not* what I thought. He is definitively *not* the Son of God, the hope of humanity, or any of that. In fact, He is dangerously deluded and going to get a lot of people in a lot of trouble.'

Peter's denial was *not* a decisive rejection of Jesus. The moments we go through of 'is it really all true?' or 'is it really all worth it?'; the times where we feel cold and distant from God; or moments like Peter where we let the chance slip by to say we're Christians, or we even say that we're not - these are Satan's attacks, sure, and evidence of our fragility - but they are not the same as the committed rejection in Judas' betrayal.

The way we really see the difference is in this: Peter got defeated in faith by Jesus' opponents one dark night. But Judas actually committed to *aiding* Jesus' opponents. Giving away Jesus' location, to aid in His capture, arrest and execution - he made a move *against* Jesus.

The person going through a crisis of faith or slipping in loyalty to Jesus by word or action is not the same as the person who is actively opposing Jesus and His Church. The answer for both of them is actually the same - it's to repent. Change their thinking, change their direction and come back fully to Jesus. It's just that the denier still knows that's the answer really, but the betrayer doesn't believe it and won't do it.

What does Jesus say to the one whom He knows is going to deny Him in vv. 31-34? He says the devil wants to shake you up - the 'you' there is plural. He wants to shake the whole community of Jesus' disciples to bring us down. To a leader amongst them, Jesus says, 'You don't see it coming, you don't think it's true - but you're going to deny me. You're going to turn away.

'But I see it coming. And actually, I'm praying for you - interceding for you, that your faith may not fail. And because of that, I'm going to talk to you about *when* you turn back to me. There's no *if* about this; I've got you. I am calling you by name - the name that *I* gave you... 'Peter...' You are God's child and my disciple. You know that, deep down.

'*When* you come back to who you really are, in me, I want you to strengthen the other disciples. Remember, the devil's trying to shake them down too. Come and be a leader amongst them again. Help them, Peter. I believe in you. There is life after your doubts about sticking with me.'

Romans 8:15 says this: 'For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by Him we cry, "Abba, Father.'" Now you know, really, that God knows you, that He adopted you, that He gave you His Spirit and knows you by name. That He's your Father, your Dad. So come back to Jesus. He's got a job for you.

*Brief silence*

*Have you 'found your place' in our church?*

For that first community of disciples sat around a dinner table with Jesus, the tensions come out in vv.23-27. They start by talking about who it was amongst them that Jesus might mean when He said, 'one of you is going to betray me.' There may have been a lot of 'It can't be me!' followed by presenting evidence of how loyal they'd been.

Perhaps there were some who whispered ‘Maybe it’s him...’ followed by gossip in cliques about how *that* person hadn’t been taking Jesus seriously. At any rate, it was all about proving themselves. *Disciples getting distracted by self-justification*. It didn’t get any better when the discussion morphed from ‘who’s most loyal’ in v.23 to ‘who’s the greatest’ in v.24.

Jesus must have felt His heart sinking. It wasn’t the first time they’d argued about this. They’d been over this one back in Luke 9, when Jesus had corrected them about it. He’d since taught other stories in their hearing about the least being the greatest and the greatest the least in His upside down Kingdom. But... here they go again.

As the twelve of them talked over each other about what made them worthy; Jesus taught them - once again - to change their attitudes by looking at Him. ‘I am among you as One who serves.’ They must have realised they had all missed the wood for the trees - *Jesus* was the greatest amongst them. And here He was, reminding them that He lived that out by welcoming, serving and shortly laying down His life, for them.

As disciples, we can get very distracted by very similar things. On the whole, our problem isn’t telling ourselves and each other that ‘I’m greater than you’ or ‘I’m greater than them.’ It’s usually, ‘they’re greater than me... I could never be a Christian like that...’ It’s feeling like you don’t fit in because you don’t pray or love or give or talk or sing like *they* do. It’s back to that comparison stuff we looked at a few weeks’ back. And Jesus says, ‘Stop comparing yourselves with each other - just *serve* each other.’

We can become *disciples getting distracted by self-identity*. All these guys at the table were really trying to do was establish that they belonged, they fitted in here with Jesus and this community. Everyone wants to be liked and respected. Everyone wants to be ‘in.’

We live in a world where we ‘need’ likes on social media. Heather went to an internet safety seminar led by one of the teachers at Holm School this week, where she learned that if kids don’t get half a dozen ‘likes’ on a post, it genuinely affects their self esteem. I’m not sure adults are much different. But I’m sure that the church is supposed to be. That we’re a community of people called not to worry about what *they* think of me, but rather to think about if *they* are okay.

The questions creep in to our church like this... ‘I’m not the same age as some of these others, so I’m not sure that *I* belong...’ ‘I don’t have *kids* quite

the same age, so I don't feel like I'm part of *that...*' 'I'm not a runner/baker/uni graduate and they all are...' 'I didn't grow up understanding the Bible like they do...' 'I'm not chatty in groups like this lot...' 'It's not really my kind of teaching/music/style of service, so I'm not sure I should be here...'

We get preoccupied by the fears of how we're not a part of things, how we haven't 'found our place,' and miss this clear, direct teaching of Jesus to distracted disciples: *Stop worrying about fitting in with each other - start focusing on just serving each other!*

Jesus is really, really keen that His disciples hear and understand this lesson this time. Just *look after* each other. As you look about your church, stop asking 'who am I?' and start asking 'how are you?' Because actually, these disciples are going to need that for what's coming next.

*How could you replace a fear about fitting in with a new way of serving other disciples of Jesus?*

In vv.35-38, Jesus reminds them of a time when they were sent out on a mission back in Luke 9 and 10, when they could head out unprepared and receive everything they needed as they shared out good news about Jesus with a world willing to listen. 'But now,' He says, 'you need to be prepared.'

He speaks of getting purse and bag together. He even talks of making sure they have a sword to defend themselves with. That sounds awkwardly like the NRA and the second amendment, in a week where Florida teenagers are speaking up for reforming gun laws that allowed their classmates to fall dead next to them.

But here's the thing - as so often, these are *disciples getting distracted by missing the point*. When Jesus finishes speaking here, they respond with, 'Look, Lord, here's two swords!' When Jesus says, 'That's enough,' He's not saying, 'yep, two swords will do.' What would they do *for*, anyway?

No, Jesus is like the exasperated parent telling the children who are too quick to fight each other, 'That's enough!' Look ahead to vv.49-51 where one of the disciples swings their sword uncertainly, and you find Him shout, 'No more of this!' In Matthew's gospel, that story comes with the famous line: 'Those who live by the sword will die by the sword.'

Jesus didn't mean them to pick up swords or do violence to defend Him or themselves. His point about the sword in v.36 is that the landscape has

changed. The world these disciples are living in is now suddenly more hostile. Jesus is not the flavour of the month preacher and healer that everyone wants to know about in Luke 9 and 10. Now, Jesus has become the enemy of the state.

So all that stuff about serving one another and looking after each other is even more important. It's not just to help us put aside self-focus. It's to help each other keep going as disciples in an increasingly hostile culture. Jesus says to those who stand with Him: look after each other, because you can't rely on sympathy or support from the world around you anymore.

This does not mean only hanging out with other Christians and steering clear of a world that's turning against Jesus. Far from it. In Luke's sequel, the book of Acts, we're going to find these disciples *going* - going out in the power of the Holy Spirit to make the name of Jesus known to those who don't know Him, and who really need to. It's the same message and mission for us today.

It's just that when things are turning against Jesus and His Church, we should expect to find what that first church community in Acts found - that going out will mean bumps, bruises and even scarring experiences. So here - in the church - we need to serve each other, look after each other well, bring healing to some of those hurts.

I was chatting with one of you this week about how we've found that following Jesus turns out to be a harder life than not following Him was. We were talking about how a life *not* following Jesus is easier - but it doesn't end well. And a life following Jesus is harder - but it is *better*. Infinitely better.

That's why we don't throw in the towel, quit the membership, walk away. That's why we won't betray Him and we don't want to deny Him. In the middle of everything else Jesus had to tell these guys at an ordinary dinner table in an everyday place was vv.28-30. He told them the extraordinary thing that was in store for those who had stood by Him.

The Kingdom of God - that community where all is put right, every tear wiped away, every sword beaten into a ploughshare and every day is followed by a thousand more - that was for *them*. The 'I stand with Jesus' people. The apostles at that meal would be given thrones of leadership over the tribes of Israel. That was their promise.

But the principle behind it encourages us to keep going as disciples too. Stand by Jesus, and you'll share in His Kingdom, and have a part to play in it forever. Keep your eyes on the prize. So to disciples who are getting distracted by sin, by betrayal, by denial, by self-concern, by missing the point and by fearing the world, Jesus says this:

'Satan will try to pull you down from within. But nothing's going to happen that I haven't seen coming. So stick with me. Those of you who haven't, just come back to me now - I've got a job for you. And stick with each other. Instead of working out if and where you fit, just serve and look after one another. It's going to get rocky out there for a while. But believe me - it's going to be worth it.'