

The Hour of Darkness¹

Luke 22:47-53

Introduction

Don't Call It a Comeback: When I was a kid (I'm guessing 13), my family went to a Houston Astros game in the Astrodome.² It had to be summer, which means it was approximately 100° with 100% humidity, and we were grateful for air conditioning. The Astros were getting crushed. If my memory is correct, they were losing something like 8 to nothing in the 9th. I do remember that it *felt* completely over. But we weren't leaving early. My dad paid for nine innings, we were staying for nine innings. We weren't staying out of hope but out of principle. We sat there, watching what looked like a lost cause... And then something shifted... A hit. A walk. A run. Then another. The crowd woke up. The other team tightened up. And in the end, they came back and won, 9-8. What felt finished wasn't finished.

- In Luke 22, if you were watching that night, you would have thought it was over. Jesus was betrayed, and soldiers with swords arrested him. It looks like darkness just won. **But darkness only gets an hour; Jesus gets forever.**

The Present Problem of Evil: Have you ever watched a moment where evil seemed completely in control?³

Revealing Darkness: What kind of king is Jesus, and what kind of kingdom is he bringing?

- When darkness *seems* to win, Jesus reveals what kind of king he really is.
- Three **questions** surface in this passage. Each one *exposes* a misunderstanding about Jesus and his kingdom.
 - A question for his betrayer exposes false devotion (vv. 47-48)
 - A question from his disciples exposes false expectations (vv. 49-51)
 - A question for his opponents exposes false power (vv. 52-53)

⁴⁷ While he was still speaking, there came a crowd, and the man called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He drew near to Jesus to kiss him, ⁴⁸ but Jesus said to him, "Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?" ⁴⁹ And when those who were around him saw what would follow, they said, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" ⁵⁰ And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear. ⁵¹ But Jesus said, "No more of this!" And he touched his ear and healed him. ⁵² Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders, who had come out against him, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? ⁵³ When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness."

¹ Alternate: When Darkness Thinks It's Winning

² Best guess is June 15, 1997; Los Angeles Dodgers at the Houston Astros (The Astrodome, Houston, TX). The Astros trailed 8-0 in the 9th before coming back to win 9-8.

³ Richard Jewell, falsely pursued by the FBI and maligned by the media as the Centennial Park Bomber at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics when, in fact, he was a *hero* for noticing the bomb, alerting authorities, and evacuating bystanders.

1. The Traitor's Question Exposes False Devotion (vv. 47-48) "Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?"

⁴⁷ While he was still speaking, there came a crowd, and the man called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He drew near to Jesus to kiss him, ⁴⁸ but Jesus said to him, "Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?"

Famous Betrayal: I have to think this is the most famous betrayal in history. Judas' name has become so anathema that we translate the other Judas as Jude just to avoid the connection.

- More famous than Anakin Skywalker betraying the Jedi, or Scar betraying Mufasa.
- More famous than Benedict Arnold, who tried to surrender *West Point* to the British.⁴ In America, his name is synonymous with traitor.
- More famous than Brutus and Julius Caesar ("*Et tu, Brute?*").⁵ Also shocking, because Brutus was a trusted and close friend to Caesar. The Ides of March are only one week from today!⁶

Pain and Proximity: The pain of Jesus' arrest and rejection is heightened by the person who leads his enemies near: the man called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. Judas wasn't an *enemy*; he was a *friend*.

- Betrayal from an enemy is expected; it *makes* sense. But betrayal from a friend cuts to the core.
 - ¹² For it is not an enemy who taunts me—then I could bear it; it is not an adversary who deals insolently with me... ¹³ But it is you, a man, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend. ¹⁴ We used to take sweet counsel together; within God's house we walked in the throng... ²⁰ My companion stretched out his hand against his friends; he violated his covenant. ²¹ His speech was smooth as butter, yet war was in his heart; his words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords (Ps 55:12-14, 20-21).
- The Bible consistently portrays betrayal by a friend as uniquely painful because it violates trust, intimacy, shared life, and covenant loyalty. That's why Judas' betrayal is so striking; he isn't an outsider attacking Jesus but an insider from the circle of disciples.
 - In Dante's *Inferno*, the famous allegory of Hell, he reserves the lowest and worst ring of hell for *treachery*, betrayal of those who trust you, and puts Judas there.
 - Betrayal is only possible when there is trust to begin with. That's why a betrayal by a friend or infidelity of a spouse is so painful.

⁴ 1780

⁵ "You too, Brutus?"

⁶ "Ides" was a mid-month calendar marker in Rome. For most months it was the 13th, but March it was the 15th. However, because of Julius Caesar's assassination on the day in 44 BC, it has become a cultural reference for political intrigue, downfall, and betrayal, famously referenced by Shakespeare the play, *Julius Caesar*: "Beware the Ides of March."

Not Obvious: Hindsight is 20/20. Because we *know* Judas was the betrayer, we think it was obvious. When Jesus tells the disciples that one of them is going to betray him, they don't turn and look to Judas.⁷ It is not obvious to them or anyone else that he is a traitor.

- It's not like they knew he was different (e.g., we all went out healing, but when Judas did it, no one got better; we all went out preaching, but when Judas did it, no one got saved).
- In fact, he was so respected by the other disciples that they put him in charge of the finances.⁸ He was the CFO of the disciples.
 - We *now* know he wasn't a true disciple, but to them he *looked* like one.
 - **You can walk with Jesus and never belong to him.**
 - "Judas heard all Christ's sermons," yet never believed (Goodwin).

Kiss is Not a Kiss: "Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss so we'd know that someone's public affection for Jesus might not be telling the whole story" (Onwuchekwa).

- To betray Jesus with a kiss is to maintain the facade of love with a heart of betrayal.
 - It's to honor him with your lips while your heart is far from him.⁹
 - It's to post Bible verses online while harboring bitterness toward a brother or sister in Christ.
 - It's to sing "I Surrender All" while refusing to let go of sin.
- **The battle of the gospel is not won on the surface but in the heart.**
 - This is a spiritual battle, not a cosmetic one.
 - The gospel is not behavior modification, but heart transformation.
 - If you are going to follow Jesus, you need to do the hard work of heart examination, rather than the surface work of image management.
 - **Behavior** follows **belief**, and if you get it backwards, you will look like Judas with a public kiss but a backstabbing heart.

What Does This Teach Us?:

- **(1) Jesus understands betrayal**
 - If you have experienced deep and personal betrayal, so has your loving Savior. He understands and has compassion and sympathy for you.
 - "Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me" (Ps 41:9). Cited Jn 13:18
- **(2) Jesus warns of betrayal**
 - There is a warning here for those of us who would publicly proclaim Christ, but privately reject him.
 - Be careful that your public and private match; that you are not using Jesus but loving him; that you are not harboring resentment or hidden sin; that you will not trade Jesus in for thirty pieces of silver when things don't go the way you expect.
- **(3) Jesus expects betrayal**
 - Jesus is not shocked or shaken by the betrayal he experiences. He knows Judas' heart, and he knows his purpose.

⁷ Matt 26:21-22, Mk 14:18-19, Lk 22:21-23, Jn 13:21-26.

⁸ Jn 12:4-6, Jn 13:29

⁹ Is 29:13, Matt 15:8, Mk 7:6

- “For the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!” (Lk 22:22).¹⁰
 - ¹⁷ For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again.” (Jn 10:17-18a).
 - Betrayal is not the end of redemption, but on the path to it.
 - (4) **Jesus died for those who betrayed him**
 - There’s a particularly sad ending to the Judas story. After Jesus is condemned to death, Judas tries to give the blood money back, but is rebuffed.¹¹ Rather than repent of his betrayal, he ultimately takes his own life.
 - He assumed he couldn’t be forgiven, that what he did was too bad, and that there was no hope for him. He thought he had to pay back his debt!
 - Judas never grasped that Jesus’ death, as awful as it was, was done *for* him, not *because* of him. Jesus knew what Judas would do, and still willingly and lovingly chose to die for him.

If Judas shows us the danger of fake discipleship, the other disciples show us a different danger. They really *do* love Jesus, they just completely misunderstand how his kingdom works.

2. The Disciples’ Question Exposes False Expectations (vv. 49-51) “Lord, shall we strike with the sword?”

⁴⁹ And when those who were around him saw what would follow, they said, “Lord, shall we strike with the sword?” ⁵⁰ And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear. ⁵¹ But Jesus said, “No more of this!” And he touched his ear and healed him.

Fight Back: Have you ever written the perfect angry text or email? Someone says something ridiculous, so you start typing, and it’s brilliant. It’s sharp. It’s devastating. You reread it thinking, this is going to destroy them. And then you hover over “send.” And suddenly the Holy Spirit whispers, “You probably shouldn’t send that.”

- The kingdom of God does not spread by force. It spreads by surrender.
- The natural instinct is to win the argument, clap back, swing the sword, and destroy the enemy.
- In many ways, this was not the mission that they signed up for. Most Jewish people were waiting for a Messiah who would deliver them from oppression and punish the wicked. They understood Jesus as a movement leader and were hoping he’d be a military conqueror.
- He wanted a conquering warrior, a political hero, or an inspiring leader, but not a suffering savior.

¹⁰ Cf. Jn 13:18; “For you will certainly carry out God’s purpose, however you act, but it makes a difference to you whether you serve like Judas or like John” (C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*).

¹¹ Matt 27:3-10

- A conquering warrior sounds attractive. Because if the Messiah wins by crushing his enemies, then we get victory without sacrifice. But if the Messiah wins through a cross, it means the path of the kingdom includes suffering for us too.
- Jesus conquers *through* sacrifice, not violence. The path to victory is through the cross, not the sword.

Suffering Servant: If we fight like the world, we misunderstand our King. We must refuse worldly weapons and embrace distinctly Christian responses. We are to fight like Christ.

- Remember, **Revelation 5**, when John *hears* of the conquering Lion, but when he turns to look, he *sees* the slain lamb. He *hears* a description that would fit expectations of a political and militaristic messianic conqueror, and he *sees* a slain lamb. What he sees interprets what he hears.
- He *hears* about a strong, royal, victorious Lion, but *sees* a slain Lamb.
- The death of Christ achieves God's victory. The victorious kingdom doesn't come in spite of the cross, but through it. The crucified Messiah is not a contradiction; he's the fulfillment. His death was not a defeat but a victory.
- Almost no one could see, and few could believe that God's messiah would conquer by dying. Dying feels like losing. But Jesus didn't conquer by avoiding suffering, but by walking through it.
- The Christian picture of power isn't domineering control; it's willing sacrifice.
 - The slaughtered, self-sacrificial Lamb is not powerless—He is the most powerful being in the universe. His death is not weakness—it is the very display of divine strength.
- So what does that mean for us? It means we fight differently. Jesus said: "But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you" (Lk 6:27–28).
- And on the cross, he practiced what he preached: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Lk 23:34).
- Peter later reflected on this moment and wrote that when Jesus was reviled, he did not revile in return (1 Pet 2:23). "Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless" (1 Pet 3:9). Paul echoes the same principle: "Repay no one evil for evil" (Rom 12:17).

Weapons of War: ³ For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. ⁴ For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. ⁵ We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ (2 Cor 10:3-5).

- Out of frustration, we often try to fight in the flesh. Every generation of the church needs to learn from the prophet Zerubbabel that "it's not by might, it's not by power, but it's by my Spirit, says the Lord" (Zech 4:7).
- The slaughtered, self-sacrificial Lamb is not powerless—He is the most powerful being in the universe. His death is not weakness—it is the very display of divine strength.

- “We must not be frightened... into accepting evil as our deliverance from evil”... No matter what happens, you are never defeated; you must understand and see this in the light of eternity (Colbert on Robert Hayden).

Swinging the Sword or Listenign to the Savior: I love how one of the disciples (John lets us know it's Peter)¹² doesn't wait for Jesus' answer. He goes ahead and swings the sword.

- It's like asking a question you don't actually want answered. “Lord, should we strike with the sword?” Before Jesus can respond—*whoosh*.
 - How often have we asked Jesus for permission, only to swing the sword without waiting?
 - Zeal without submission is not obedience.

Comical Moment: Peter pulls out a sword and cuts off an ear (proof he's a fisherman, not a soldier). A soldier would have got more than an ear! Kind of a miss.

- Imagine how strange that moment must have been.
 - This man (Malchus)¹³ goes home: “Honey, you'll never believe what happened tonight.” “What?” “A guy chopped my ear off.” “No, he didnt.” “Yes, he did!” “Your ear is right there.” “Oh, right. Jesus put it back on”...
- Peter cuts off an ear, and Jesus puts it back on. “No more of this.”
 - Peter is cutting ears off, Jesus is putting them back on.
 - Peter is fighting, Jesus is healing.
 - Be careful that we don't find ourselves working against Jesus, rather than with him.
 - Am I advancing the kingdom like Jesus? Or defending myself like Peter? Am I trusting the plan of God and the method of God or trying to force things according to my agenda?

True Power: In the middle of being arrested, Jesus doesn't just refuse to fight back—he heals his enemy.

- The kingdom of God does not advance by the sword. It advances through the cross.
- Peter thinks the kingdom needs defending. Jesus knows the kingdom will come through suffering.

Take the Sword: The sword of judgment will soon fall, but not on Peter, not on Malchus, not on the soldiers. It will fall on Jesus.

- He refuses the sword here because he is about to bear the sword of judgment himself.
- And by taking that sword, he brings healing to the very people who came to arrest him.

Judas betrays Jesus. Peter defends Jesus. The religious leaders think they have defeated Jesus.

¹² Jn 18:10

¹³ Jn 18:10

3. The Enemies' Question Exposes False Power (vv. 52-53) "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs?"

⁵² Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders, who had come out against him, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? ⁵³ When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness."

Inadequate Leadership: This interaction reveals the false religious leadership.

- **(1) Fake Perception:** The way they come against Jesus reveals their misunderstanding of the situation. They completely misunderstand who Jesus is.
 - They have brought a posse with weapons as if he were a violent criminal (a better translation of "robber"). They act like Jesus is some sort of dangerous outlaw.
 - He has been healing the sick, teaching the crowds, casting out demons, yet they treat him like a criminal.
 - Their problem is not a lack of information, but spiritual blindness.
 - Do I submit to Jesus as he is, or only as I wish him to be?
- **(2) False Righteousness:** Their actions expose a deep hypocrisy. They *know* they are wrong because they have to arrest Jesus under the cover of darkness. When he was right in front of them in the temple, they did nothing.
 - Evil always prefers the dark. "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (1 Jn 1:5). We are called to "walk as children of light" (Eph 5:8, 1 Thes 5:5).
 - They are not *defenders of righteousness*; their actions reveal they are hypocritical cowards.
 - Do I publicly accept Jesus, but privately resist him?
- **(3) False Power:** They think they are in control because they have an armed posse and some measure of temporal authority, but Jesus makes clear that he is in control.
 - He is allowing their "hour of power." They are not arresting Jesus; he is giving himself up.
 - Do I trust Jesus when circumstances look like darkness is winning?

Hour: In Luke 4, the hometown crowd is so furious at Jesus that they want to throw him off a cliff? Why didn't they? He just walked through them and went away. Or in Mark 3, when the Pharisees team up with the politicians to try and destroy Jesus, why can't they? Or when the leaders try to arrest him in John 7, why are they unsuccessful? Because it wasn't the appointed time. They are not in control; he is. Darkness has no power here; it is always on a leash.

Conclusion

Take Heart: Your dark season may feel endless, but it's not.

- Cancer, conflict, and cultural crises do not get the last word. Your suffering is *not* sovereign; God is. Darkness is on a timer, and the clock is ticking. God has not lost control in your life.

- How do I know?

Gospel: Because God sent his Son, Jesus, to walk through the greatest darkness. He to the cross to endure a pain we deserved. We, in fact, betrayed him in our sin, yet he died for us. And on the other side of the darkness of the cross was the light of the empty tomb.

- That's a God we can trust. That's a Savior we can follow. That's a promise that can sustain.
- Darkness may get an hour, Jesus gets forever.