I heard again the familiar statement this past week told to students of every
generation. Every first-year class is told the same thing; that in any group of 3 only
1 student will make it to graduation.

Students are supposed to take that observation as a warning; so as not rest on their
laurels; to work hard and get through to be the one who graduates.

Students’ not making it to the end of their studies is unfortunate; but of greater
concern is an observation from our passage today, where like some professing
Christians, one of the twelve disciples, turns his back on Jesus.

Judas does not stand alone as one who walked away from Jesus: take a moment
to think of the men and women and children who have sat by your side in church;
think of those who have served alongside of you… where are they?

Where have they all gone?

Many people you and I have known and loved have abandoned the faith they once
professed; now they have no interest in Jesus and his work of salvation.

There is a real danger that you may be one that falls away from the Lord.

1 Beware of the danger of a hardened heart

This is a thing most painfully evident in the case of Judas Iscariot.

For 3 years he walked in the presence of Jesus; exposed to his teaching and
example. Here is a man who had been in a favoured place in the circle of the twelve
disciples, seemingly in a good spiritual place.

We can see by the response of the disciple to Jesus comment that “one of you will
betray me” in v22 “the disciples looked at one another, uncertain of who he spoke: is
positive proof that over the past three years Judas had fitted in as one of the loyal
followers of Jesus.

His outward conduct had given the other apostles no reason to think that he was
the one to betray Jesus.

Like the other disciples he too had his feet washed by Jesus; hearing the challenge
Jesus gave to Peter that v8 ...If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.

All of this and he is not moved to abort his betrayal of Jesus.

I would have thought that the declaration by Jesus to Peter in v10 ...you are clean, but
not every one of you, would have got Judas’ attention; stirring his conscience just a
little.
Would you not have thought that Judas seeing Jesus v21 troubled in spirit and openly saying …one of you will betray me would have got him a little nervous about his intended plans?

But it didn’t.

Surely the solemn words of Jesus to him in 27 …What you are going to do, do quickly, would have had some impact on him making him ashamed of his intended scheme with the soldiers. 

But nothing seems to have moved him. Like one whose conscience is dead, buried and gone; he rises and goes out to do his wicked work, and parts from the Lord Jesus forever.

Dear friends, here is a solemn warning to all of us.

The pathway to hardness is slow and unnoticed. It grows out of an inner coldness or slow drifting that only later (and perhaps too late) begins to show itself outwardly.

The extent, to which you and I may become hardened, by resisting the word of God and the Spirit of God, is one of the most fearful facts in the world.

You may get to the place of becoming past feeling anything; numb in your conscience; like me not feeling anything recently when a doctor cut my toe nail after giving me an anaesthetic.

Leon and Stuart

It is possible for you to lose all sense of the fear of God, any shame of your spiritual tardiness or any feeling of remorse over sin, and end up having a heart as hard as nails; blind to every warning and deaf to every appeal.

This is a terrible thing and one which is not uncommon among professing believers.

I would beg of you today to watch your heart and beware of giving way to the beginnings of sin.

The safest Christian is one who constantly has some measure of the fear of God Proverbs 28:14 Blessed is the one who fears the Lord always, but whoever hardens his heart falls into calamity.

The strongest Christian is the one who feels his weakness most, and cries most frequently … Psalm 119:117 Hold me up and I will be safe and have regard for your statutes continually.

2 Beware of your enemy the devil

John tells us about the devil’s influence on Judas’s life early on the in the chapter.
John 13:2 During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray him.

Later on in the evening after Jesus had offered the morsel of bread to Judas, John 13:27 ...Satan entered into him.

We cannot deny different levels of active influence that the devil has on Judas.

There is first the power of suggestion; thereby placing thoughts in the mind of Judas to convince him to proceed with the act of betrayal.

There is then the taking over of Judas life by possessing him and thereby ruling him; governing his thoughts and prompting his actions.

You and I are in danger of being outsmarted by Satan. We ought to have the sense and resolve as Paul urges 2 Corinthians 2:11 ...that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.

1 Peter 5:8 Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. 9 Resist him, firm in your faith...

Our only safety lies in resisting him right at the beginning of any of his devious schemes; not giving in to any of his advances. Strong as he is, he has no power to do us harm, if we call on the stronger One in heaven and use the means he has appointed...

James 4:7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

If you begin playing in the devil’s backyard or throw caution to the wind flirting with the devil; you don’t know where it will all end or how far you will fall; perhaps never to recover.

Fiddling with the first thoughts of sin; being flippant about evil; allowing Satan to flatter you; neglecting the spiritual disciplines... these may seem like insignificant actions but it is precisely at that point that the road to ruin often begins.

JC Ryle: He that allows Satan to sow wicked thoughts will soon find within his heart a crop of wicked habits. Happy is he that really believes that there is a devil, and, believing, watches and prays daily that he may be kept from temptations.

3 Flourish in the love of Jesus

At the end of the conversation after washing the disciples’ feet John tells us that 13:21 Jesus was troubled in spirit, and testified, Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.

JC Ryle: The whole length and breadth and depth of our Master’s troubles during his earthly ministry are far beyond the conception of most people. His death and suffering on the cross were only the heading up and completion of his sorrows. All throughout his life; partly
from the general unbelief of the Jews; partly from the special hatred of the Pharisees and Sadducees; partly from the weakness and infirmity of his few followers – he must have been…

Isaiah 53:3 …a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;

The trouble spoken of here in John 13 was particularly and exceptionally painful. JC Ryle: It was the bitter sorrow of seeing a chosen Apostle deliberately becoming an apostate, a backslider and an ungrateful traitor.

Jesus knowing all along that Judas would betray him (see this from his reference in John 13:18 to Psalm 41:9) does not lessen, but intensifies, the hurt of being stabbed in the back by a close friend.

It is absolutely clear that Jesus had treated Judas in the same way as he did the other 11 disciples. Jesus treated him as nothing other than a close friend and disciple for three years.

And so now, understandably, in view of the imminent betrayal by Judas, Jesus likens his troubled spirit to the deep hurt that David felt when he was betrayed by his friend, Ahithophel;

Psalms 41:9 Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me.

Jesus loved his disciples, including Judas; even in the face of betrayal – making it clear to Judas that he knew what he was planning.

But even then, the way Jesus communicates that he knows what Judas is about to do – by dipping a morsel of bread and sharing it with him – was a recognized gesture of love and affection.

Judas accepts the piece of bread, but spurns the love that lies behind it.

Can you see then why Jesus is troubled in his spirit?

Passages like this ought to make us see the amazing love of Christ for sinners. We see his love for sinners in that again and again Jesus is willingly draining “cups of sorrow to the dregs in working out our salvation” (JC Ryle).

Passages like this make it so clear what trouble our Lord Jesus went through for the sake of our souls.

Paul captures the nature of the deep love of Christ for sinners in Romans 5:8 … but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Calvary is the climactic end point of a long journey of humiliation for Jesus; a journey filled with repeated sorrow and grief; a journey demonstrating the indescribable love of God in securing underserved salvation for sinners.
Does God love the worst of us sinners? Yes and yes again; do not for a minute doubt the love of God in Christ for sinful people.

On the one hand the focus in the passage is of betrayal and hurt, but on the other hand (so as not to forget) we are given a glimpse of the unique love of Christ for his disciples.

It is helpful to read “one of you will betray me” in the context of John 13:23 One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was reclining at table close to Jesus,

Here is a striking contrast. AW Pink: Our attention is diverted for a moment from the base treachery and horrible hatred of Judas to one who Christ had attracted, whose heart had been won by His beauty…

One man (John) plus another ten men and millions of other men and women down through the years have blossomed in life and death and eternity by seeing and believing and receiving the love of God in Christ…

Sadly, one man (Judas) and tons of other men and women have withered on the road of destruction; stubbornly blind to the love of God in Christ.

Conclusion

There are no wasted or unnecessary words in the Bible. And so the phrase in John 13:30 So, after receiving the morsel of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night conveys a strong and sad message.

This is more than just a reference to the time of day.

As Judas went out to do this treacherous thing; there began that “hour” of the power of darkness (Luke 22:53 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.”); when God allowed his enemies to put out the Light of Life…

So, too, it was night in the soul of Judas, for he had turned his back on the Light.

Like Cain, he went from the presence of the Lord; like Balaam he “loved gain from wrong doing” (2 Peter 2:15); like Ahithophel he went forth to betray a “close friend”…

It was night; John 3:19 And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.

You will face real dangers with respect to the well-being of your soul. Beware lest you join the ranks of Judas. Beware of loving the darkness and going on into the night…… rather live in the light.

- Steer clear of the danger of your heart growing hard…
- Resist the powerful and destructive schemes of your enemy the devil…
- Flourish in the love of God in Christ…