

SECTION 4: THE LAST SUPPER AND JESUS' ARREST

Must I not drink the cup that my Father has given me?
John 18:11b

An Orderly, Measured Manner

Like King Saul, who attempted and failed several times to kill David, angry men made several unsuccessful attempts to kill Jesus (Lk. 4:28–30; Jn. 8:59; 10:31–39). None of those attempts had a place in God's plan; they were merely spontaneous acts of human rage, and each time, God made a way for Jesus to escape. Satan had no part in those attacks; he was following God's directives, not man's, and he would have known it was not God's appointed time for Jesus to die. Besides, it was beneath Satan's dignity to take part in the rash actions of enraged humans; he is much more organized and deliberate than that. Satan despises anarchy and disorganized hotheads, and it would not even be surprising to learn that he played a role in helping Jesus to escape those situations. He did service *for* God, not against Him.

Satan went about his assigned mission against Jesus in an orderly, measured manner, as he had always done his work, mindful of how his status before God would be affected. On occasion, his sons did likewise, taking time to plan their moves against Jesus (Mt. 22:15; Mk. 3:6; Jn. 11:53), mindful how their status before the people would be affected (cf. Mt. 26:5; Mk. 11:18).

Perfect hatred, like perfect love, can wait. It watches and thinks as it moves in for the kill. Satan knew it when the right time came for Jesus to die. Jesus knew it, too (Jn. 12:23; 13:1; 17:1). Everything was in place. Jesus was ready to take on the cross and finish his work, and Satan was ready to take possession of Judas and finish his.

Satan in Judas

Satan knew that Jesus was a holy, anointed man, but knowing that would not have prevented him from killing Jesus any more than it prevented him from afflicting the perfect and upright Job or moving King David to sin. What difference would it have made to Satan for God to send him against Job, David, or Jesus, except that Jesus was greater than the other two, being the Messiah? They were all just humans in his sight. At the Last Supper, Satan knew he was doing God service when he took possession of Judas and moved him to go to chief priests (Lk. 22:3). Jesus knew that Satan was doing God service, too, but the difference was that Jesus knew whose plan was really being executed.

Luke tells us that Satan entered into Judas a few days before Jesus' last Passover meal, when Judas made his deal with the chief priests to betray Jesus (Lk. 22:4).¹ John says that Satan entered into Judas during the Last Supper, immediately after Jesus handed Judas a piece of bread (Jn. 13:27).² Both were right. No rule requires an evil spirit that possesses a person to stay inside that person continually. It is the person, not the spirit, who is in bondage. Once Judas was taken over Satan, Satan was free to come into him and go out of him as he pleased.

Satan's original sin was pride at being "perfect in beauty" (Ezek. 28:12), and he would never have left his perfectly beautiful body to possess a human except in hope of receiving something greater. It may even be that Satan thought that if he was granted to sit at God's right hand, he would be given a body

¹ For an explanation of why Judas gave in fully to Satan at this point, see the Thoughts for the Evening series at GoingtoJesus.com, for February 17–19: "Judas the Slanderer", Parts 4–6.

² Immediately after Satan entered Judas at the Last Supper, Jesus spoke and said, "What you do, do quickly" (Jn. 13:27). I have wondered often who it was that Jesus was really speaking to.

more glorious than the one he first had. That may not be the case, but either way, the promotion he hoped for was of such glory that whatever was lost in the process of attaining it would be worth it. That hope is the only thing that could have lured Satan out of his perfectly beautiful body to possess the lowly body of a mortal man.³ The significance he attached to this mission is revealed in the fact that Satan had never before abandoned his body to personally possess anyone. Sensing that it was a mission of unparalleled importance to God, it would have been a mission of unparalleled importance to him, as well.

Judas

The Scriptural perspective on Judas directs us away from a simplistic answer as to why he betrayed Jesus. It is easy to dismiss Judas as a man bereft of conscience, or so covetous that he sold Jesus out for nothing but money. However, it is much more in keeping with the biblical description of Judas that he betrayed Jesus because he was frustrated with his lack of progress in becoming king of the world. Judas did have a weakness for money (Jn. 12:6), but by all accounts, thirty pieces of silver, Judas' reward for information on Jesus' whereabouts, was not so great an amount that it alone would have persuaded Judas to betray his Messiah.⁴

From the Scriptures, we learn, first, that Judas and Jesus were very close. The Spirit prophesied through David of the sweet fellowship that Jesus and Judas enjoyed:

Psalm 55

12. It was not an enemy who reproached me; then, I could have borne it. Nor was it one who hated me who puffed himself up against me; then, I would have hidden myself from him.
13. But it was you, a man my own equal, my intimate friend, and my companion,
14. for we took sweet counsel together, and walked among the throng in the house of God.

Second, although Matthew was a “publican”, that is, a professional money handler, Jesus chose Judas rather than Matthew to carry his money and manage expenditures (cf. Jn. 13:27–29). That choice tells us something important about Jesus' estimation of Judas' ability.

Third, Judas believed, along with the other disciples, the general public, and all of heaven, including Satan, that when the Messiah came, he would quickly take over the world, as the prophets said (e.g. Isa. 2:2–4). Those who believed that Jesus was the Messiah, as Judas did, and those who knew he was the Messiah, as the angels and Satan did, expected that of Jesus. But Jesus would not do it. Even after Jesus rose from the dead, the disciples continued to expect him to set up an earthly kingdom (Acts 1:6). In that regard, Jesus was a disappointment to them all.

So, rather than Judas hating Jesus or merely betraying him for money, it is better to see Judas as betraying Jesus to force his hand, that is, to put him in a position of having to publicly prove he was the Messiah, or die. And since it was unthinkable to Judas that Jesus, with all his power, would allow men to arrest him, much less abuse and kill him, it probably seemed like a good idea to force Jesus to do what the prophets said he would do. It is also possible that Judas expected to be rewarded by Jesus to sit at his right hand when he set up his kingdom, being the only disciple wise enough and courageous enough to do what needed to be done to make it happen.

Had Judas betrayed Jesus for no reason but financial gain, or if he was a degenerate man with no conscience, he would not have so deeply regretted his actions and tried to repent when he saw that Jesus was not going to resist his captors.

³ One other time, Satan wanted a human body, that of Moses (Jude 1:9), but we are not told why.

⁴ What those thirty pieces of silver would be worth in modern currency is unknown and greatly debated.

Matthew 27

3. When Judas, the one who betrayed him, saw that he was condemned, he changed his mind and returned the silver pieces to the high priests and the elders,
4. saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood!" But they said, "What is that to us? You see to that."
5. Then he threw the silver pieces down in the temple and ran off, and went and hanged himself.

When it became obvious to Judas that his plan had failed, he could not live with himself. "*What have I done?*" he no doubt thought. And being as close to Jesus as he had been for several years, he knew enough to realize that there was no hope of forgiveness for him. He would have remembered Jesus words, and for the first time taken them to heart: "The Son of man is going away, just as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It were good for him if that man had not been born" (Mk. 14:21).

Good Ideas

When Judas betrayed Jesus, he was not trying to do something he thought was evil. Rather, he was "thinking to do God service" by forcing Jesus to do what everyone who believed in Jesus thought he should do. I said earlier that "the best that even the best of us do is contrary to the will of God, and the best that the best of us are, is wrong," and nothing shows this better than Judas' effort to do what he felt was a very good thing.

Judas was not trying to do evil because he did not have to try; his heart was not right with God, and so, whatever he did was going to be evil without him trying. Life is a matter of the heart; what you are in your heart determines the quality of whatever you do, no matter what you think you are doing. That is why David gave this wise counsel to his young son Solomon: "Above all else, guard your heart, for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23).

When I was young in the Lord, I often unexpectedly found myself praying earnestly that God would rescue me from my own opinion. I knew it was a good thing for which to pray, but I wondered why the Lord put that prayer in my heart. Now, I know. Peter prophesied of false teachers rising up among believers, who would "introduce opinions that lead to damnation" (2Pet. 2:1). He was speaking of opinions taught as gospel by men who believe that Jesus is Lord. But the gospel is not an opinion; it is a revelation. God has no opinions, and neither do the men He sends, for revelation delivers men from their opinions. Paul was not an exception to this; he was an example:

Galatians 1

11. I would have you to know, brothers, regarding the gospel preached by me, that it is not according to man.
12. For I neither received it from a man, nor was I taught it, but *I received it* by revelation from Jesus Christ.

There is no way but by revelation that the gospel can be preached. The truth cannot be found by study, not even by studying the Bible. It is not to the least extent of men; it is altogether of God. If the doctrine of Christ is not revealed by God, it cannot be known. The body of Christ, itself, is a family created by the power of God, impossible for man to enter except by the baptism that Jesus gives (1Cor. 12:13). The love of God is infused into our hearts by the Spirit, or we do not have it, no matter how nice

we are. Every element of the kingdom of God is altogether in the Spirit, and no man, of himself, can contribute to it, take from it, or participate in it. And every time a man tries to help God run it, as Judas did, he sins.

There is nothing more dangerous to your soul than a good idea put forth as gospel. Opinions about God are heresies. Every Christian church on earth originated with someone's good idea, someone's opinion who was "thinking to do God service", and every one of them is a lie. None of them can save because all of them are heresies. God has no ministers except those he sets on fire with his power (Heb. 1:7), and no children except those who are led by His Spirit (Rom. 8:14). Life in the Spirit is an impossible life for man, but Jesus made the impossible possible for us.

Satan Asked for the Disciples

Something Jesus said during the Last Supper reveals that Satan still had access to God in heaven:

Luke 22

31. The Lord said, "O Simon, Simon! Satan has earnestly asked for you men, that he might sift you like wheat.
32. But I have prayed for you [this "you" is singular, referring only to Peter], that your faith will not give out."

To be sifted means to be put through a hard trial, which is also what Satan suggested in the book of Job when he said to God, "Stretch out your hand now and strike all that he has, and he will curse you to your face," and later, "Stretch out your hand now and strike his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face" (Job 1:11; 2:5). In both those scenes, Satan was politely suggesting that God sift Job like wheat.

The important point, however, is that when Satan "earnestly asked for" Jesus' disciples, it was God that he asked. There would have been no point in him asking Pontius Pilate or Caiaphas; the disciples did not belong to them. No one but God could have granted Satan's request because the disciples belonged to Him (Jn. 17:6-9). Additionally, Jesus' statement suggests that God granted Satan's request for the disciples, for Jesus did not say to Peter, "I have prayed that you will not be sifted." Rather, he said, "I have prayed for you, that your faith will not give out [when Satan sifts you]."

Unlike what we saw in the book of Job, we are not told how the heavenly conversation between God and Satan went, but God's care for His people makes it certain that, as in the case of Job, it was actually God's idea to sift the disciples, not Satan's. God may even have initiated the subject of the disciples, as he initiated the subject of Job. If so, the conversation would have been something like this:

God: "Where have you come from?"

Satan: "From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it."

God: "Have you considered the Messiah's twelve disciples, how much they love him and how faithful they are?"

Satan: "You know how men are. You have blessed them greatly, but stretch out your hand and put them in fear for their lives, and they will curse and swear they never knew him."

God: "Behold, those disciples are in your power, only, do not kill them."

We are not told if Satan had any other thoughts about what would be sifted out of the disciples, but whatever Satan thought doesn't matter. What determined everything is that God had determined to sift pride out of Jesus' disciples, Peter especially, and He chose Satan to get it done.

The Disciples Did Not Believe Jesus

When Jesus warned his disciples during at the Last Supper that men would cruelly persecute and kill them, thinking they were doing service to God, he knew that Satan and his sons, Judas now among them, were about to do that to him. Knowing that Satan was at that moment in the process of gathering the priest's officers to come arrest him, Jesus calmly said to his disciples, "The ruler of this world is coming" (Jn. 14:30). It is revealing that Jesus did not say to his disciples, "Judas and the officers are coming." That is what anyone else would have said because that is all that anyone else would have seen, but Jesus knew better.

While Satan was shrewd enough to use men, he knew them, and he put no trust in them. Jesus also knew men, and he put no trust in them either because "he knew [better than Satan knew] what was in man" (Jn. 2:25). But men do not know themselves. Jesus, gathered around the table with his beloved disciples, told them that later that very night, they would all forsake him (Mt. 26:31), and he told Peter that he would outright deny him (Mt. 26:34). But the disciples could not imagine themselves doing such a thing, and they did not believe him:

Mark 14 (cf. Mt. 26:35)

27a. Jesus said to them, "Tonight, all of you will be offended because of me."

. . . .

29. Then Peter said to him, "Even though all [these other disciples] be offended, I certainly won't!"

30. And Jesus said to him, "Truly, I tell you that today, this very night, before a rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times."

31. But he said all the more vehemently, "If I have to die with you, I will never deny you!" And then they all began talking like that.

Jesus didn't argue with them about it; there was no point. He knew they could not see it. They would have to be sifted. So, he finished what he had to say to them, and then prayed earnestly for God to save them (Jn. 17). Then, when they had sung a hymn of praise (Mt. 26:30), Jesus led them out of Jerusalem, across the Kidron Valley, and into a garden on the Mount of Olives. There, Jesus got alone with God and poured out his heart to Him.

The Arrest

The disciples' sifting took place in the garden of Gethsemane. Judas, knowing that Jesus frequented that place, led the officers there to arrest him.

Matthew 26

47. Behold, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a large multitude, with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and elders of the people.

48. Now, the one who betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, "Whoever I kiss is the man. Arrest him."

49. And he went up at once to Jesus, and said, "Hello, Rabbi." And he kissed him affectionately.

50. Then Jesus said to him, "Friend, why are you here?" At that moment, they came forward, laid hands on Jesus, and arrested him.

Satan was looking at Jesus through Judas' eyes as Judas walked up to Jesus and kissed him on the cheek. Satan knew Jesus, and Jesus knew Satan. (Judas didn't know either one.) They had met face to face before, several years prior in the Judean wilderness. What were Jesus' and Satan's thoughts as they looked knowingly at each other, surrounded as they were by ignorant humans, the terrified disciples and the officers with their flickering torches? Satan must have been smugly gratified that he was accomplishing another important task for God. Jesus was resigned to do his Father's will and "was brought as a lamb to the slaughter" (Isa. 53:7b).

Jesus' Friends

In a stirring testimony many years ago, an old saint we called "Uncle Joe" explained why Jesus greeted Judas as "friend". He said, "I'll tell you who your real friends are. Anyone who does something to you that causes you to press on and be obedient to the will of God is your friend." That night, both Judas and Satan were fulfilling their appointed roles in God's plan, and in doing that, they were unwittingly helping Jesus accomplish God's will for his life; therefore, by Uncle Joe's definition, they were his friends. When a man's ways please God, He makes even his enemies his servants, using them only to do him good (cf. Prov. 16:7). Satan hated Jesus, but his hatred determined nothing. It was God's love for us that determined everything. Jesus' suffering and death was God's will, and everything that Satan, Judas, and the chief priests did only forwarded God's wondrous work in him. God made them all Jesus' friends, no matter how much they hated him.

When the torch-carrying posse laid hands on Jesus, Peter pulled out his sword and attacked them, trying to stop Jesus' friends from helping him accomplish God's purpose. That was Peter's good idea, but Jesus rebuked Peter for it, saying, "Put your sword in the sheath! Must I not drink the cup that my Father has given me?" (Jn. 18:11). That statement challenges us with a question: If Jesus saw Satan and the mob as God's servants, delivering God's cup of suffering and death for him to drink, how can we see it any other way? What better idea would we have had than what God was doing?

The Sifting

When the officers from the priests arrested Jesus, the disciples forsook him and fled for their lives (Mk. 14:50), just as Jesus and Satan both knew they would. But Peter's sifting did not end in the garden. He followed the officers and Jesus "at a distance" (Mt. 26:58) into the courtyard of the high priest, where a little slave girl recognized Peter. She came up to him and said, "You were definitely with Jesus of Galilee."

Matthew 26

70. But [Peter] denied him before them all, saying, "I don't know what you're talking about."

71. But after he went out to the entranceway, another girl saw him, and she said to those who were there, "This man was definitely with Jesus the Nazarene."

72. And he again denied *it*, with an oath, saying, "I don't know the man!"

73. Then, a little while later, those standing there came up and said to Peter, "Surely, you are also one of them, for even your accent gives you away."

74. Then he began to bind himself under a curse and to swear, "I don't know the man!" And immediately, the rooster crowed.

75. And Peter was reminded of the saying Jesus had spoken to him. . . . And he went outside, and wept bitterly.

The Peter who rebuked Jesus when Jesus spoke of his approaching death and who audaciously promised Jesus that he would save him (Mt. 16:21–23), the Peter who declared that he would never deny him even though the others did and swore that he would die for Jesus – that Peter – was sifted out of Peter’s soul in the high priest’s courtyard. It was painful, but his proud self-confidence was finally sifted out of him, just as it would later be sifted out of young Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9). But Jesus had prayed for Peter, and that prayer saved him. Peter would never have recovered after so vilely denying the Lord, but for the intercession of the Lord whom he had denied.⁵

Peter had so little self-confidence remaining after God sifted him that he would not say yes when the resurrected Jesus asked Peter if he loved him more than the other disciples did:

John 21

15. When they had eaten, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me more than these men do?” He said to him, “Surely, Lord, you know that I’m your friend.”⁶ He said to him, “Feed my lambs.”
16. Again, he said to him a second time, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me?” He said to him, “Surely, Lord, you know that I’m your friend.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.”
17. The third time, he said to him, “Simon, son of Jonah, are you my friend?” Peter was grieved because the third time, he said to him, “Are you my friend?” And he said to him, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I’m your friend.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.”

Peter could no longer boast of utter devotion to Jesus. Peter did love Jesus, but the excessive self-confidence which had formerly tainted his expression of that love was now sifted out of his soul.

SECTION 5: THE CRUCIFIXION

“My God! My God! Why Have You Forsaken me?”

Mt. 27:46

God Did Not Answer

After Jesus was abused and condemned in the house of the high priest (cf. Mt. 26:57–68), he was led to the Roman procurator, Pontius Pilate. Pilate discerned that Jesus was innocent, and he said so (Mt. 27:24), but when he could no longer resist the Jews’ demand that Jesus be crucified, he turned him over to his soldiers for execution.

John 19

- 16b. And they took Jesus, and led him away.
17. And bearing his cross, he went out to the place called “Place of a Skull”, which is called in Hebrew, “Golgotha”,
18. where they crucified him, and two others with him, on the right and on the left, and Jesus in the middle.

⁵ In an odd twist, Judas was damned after he confessed to knowing Jesus, while Peter was saved after he denied knowing him. It was a matter of the heart.

⁶ Jesus used a word for love (*ἀγαπάω*) that implied, in this case, steadfast devotion. Peter responded with a word (*φιλέω*) that meant only the love of a friend.

Typically, it did not take many hours for crucified men to die, but for any of them, death was too long in coming, for crucifixion was excruciatingly painful. Jesus, writhing in agony on the cross, felt utterly deserted by God, and pitifully cried out to Him, “Why have you forsaken me?” (Mt. 27:46; Mk. 15:34). But God did not answer. The men standing there took notice of Jesus’ despairing cry (Mt. 27:26–49), but what would have stood out to Satan was God’s refusal to answer. He could only have taken that as confirmation that God had indeed rejected Jesus and was pleased with his death, as the prophet had foretold:

Isaiah 53

10a. It pleased the LORD to crush him; He has put him to grief.

11a. He will see the travail of his soul and be satisfied.

God Bowed the Heavens

Watching the crucifixion from a distance were women who had followed Jesus from Galilee. They were also disciples, who at their own expense had ministered to the needs of Jesus and his disciples as they traveled (Mt. 27:55; Mk. 15:40–41; cf. Lk. 8:1–3). Close by him, at the foot of the cross, was Jesus’ mother with her sister, and John, the disciple who loved Jesus and whom Jesus especially loved (Jn. 19:25). Mary was so close that she heard her son’s groanings and to see his tears. When Jesus turned his head and saw her, he pulled up on the spikes in his hands and pushed on the spikes in his feet to position himself to speak, paying a price in pain to ask John to take care of his mother for him (Jn. 19:25–27).

Strangers passing by were not so kind. They joined the priests and elders in mocking Jesus’ torment, not only daring Jesus to come down from the cross, but also daring God to come rescue him:

Matthew 27

39. Those passing by were reviling him, wagging their heads

40. and saying, “You who are going to tear down the temple and in three days raise it up, save yourself! If you are the son of God, come down from the cross!”

41. And likewise, the chief priests also, mocking him with the scribes and the elders and Pharisees, kept saying,

42. “He saved others; himself, he cannot save! If he is the King of Israel, let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him!

43. He trusted in God; let Him deliver him now, if He wants him! Didn’t he say, ‘I am God’s Son’?”

God saw it all, and though He remained silent when Jesus cried out to Him, He bent the heavens so that He would be close to him. Through David, the Son had foretold that the Father would do this:

Psalm 18

6. In my distress, I called on the LORD; yea, I cried out to my God for help. He heard my voice from His temple, and my plea came to Him, into His ears.

7. Then the earth shook and trembled, and the foundations of the mountains moved; they were shaken because He burned with anger.

8. Smoke went up from His nostrils, and fire from His mouth devoured. Coals were kindled by it.

9. He bowed the heavens also, and came down, and thick darkness was under His feet.⁷

⁷ In the Bible, the earth was made dark every time God personally came near it (e.g., Gen. 15:12–18; Dt. 5:2, 23).

It was not a secret in heaven that the Messiah was special to God, and if nothing else had done so, this astonishing event, the bending down of the very heavens, confirmed it. That and the trembling earth certainly persuaded one of the Roman soldiers at the scene that Jesus was special to God (Mk. 15:39). It may have also revealed to those within the bending heavens that God's heart was breaking. We cannot say about that, but they would certainly have seen God feeling something they had never before seen Him feel.

God's self-restraint while watching His beloved Son suffer saved us.

Satan no doubt also saw that God was grieved, but even so, God's insistence on the Messiah's death would have meant to Satan that God required that justice be done, regardless of how it made Him feel. The disobedient Messiah had to pay the penalty for his high-minded refusal to accept the honor that God, through Satan, had offered him. To Satan, Isaiah's prophecy meant that even if God was grieved, indeed, even if He had tears running down His holy face, He still was pleased and satisfied with Jesus' suffering and death. And in thinking that, Satan was right, but not for the reason he supposed.

Satan was pleased and satisfied, too, but he would not have been so pleased if he had known who Jesus really was, or what God was doing in him. Paul was speaking of more than human rulers when he wrote that "none of the rulers of this age understood, for had they understood, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1Cor. 2:8). No one knew what was really happening at Calvary; everyone there, including the Roman soldiers, were being used by God for a purpose so profound that no one could perceive it. Knowing this, Jesus prayed for them all as he suffered on the cross, "Father, forgive them; they don't know what they're doing" (Lk. 23:34).

An Abject Failure?

Throughout the whole process – the arrest, the sham trial, the cruel abuse, and the gruesome crucifixion – God never indicated to Satan that He wanted the process to stop. And the suffering Son, whose only remaining joy was in knowing that he was doing the Father's will, did not cry out to be rescued. In Satan's eyes, Jesus was an especially anointed man of God, indeed, the mightiest man of God ever to have walked the earth. But he also saw Jesus as a proud transgressor who was now facing God's perfect justice at the hand of the law's stern Prosecutor, the soon-to-be co-regent with God.

No one on earth would have believed that Jesus had any favor with God. People were aghast at his hideous appearance on the cross (Isa. 52:14). The blood that covered his beaten face was mixed with spit from his tormenters (Mt. 26:67–68); portions of his beard had been ripped out (Isa. 50:6); his head was swollen from the thorns that had been driven into it (Mt. 27:29–30); he was so emaciated that all his bones could be counted (Ps. 22:17); his skin and flesh had been ripped off his back by the Roman lash (Jn. 19:1), and the blood and gore ran down and covered his legs. He no longer looked like a human being, as Isaiah said, "Many shall be aghast at you. So great shall be the disfigurement of his visage that it will be beyond human, and his form, beyond the sons of men (Isa. 52:14). Beyond the physical suffering, Jesus was mocked (Mt. 27:41–43), despised, and rejected by many of God's own people (cf. Isa. 53:3), considered insane by his earthly family (Mk. 3:21), and forsaken by even his closest friends. And now, he was being executed by the cruelest means possible. By any standard known to man, Jesus was an abject failure as Messiah.

Jesus Was Given a Choice

We have emphasized the fact that God was in complete control of Jesus' suffering and death, but because Jesus was devoted to doing God's will, Jesus was equally in control of it. He once told his disciples,

John 10

17. “The Father loves me because I lay down my life, that I might receive it again.
18. Nobody takes it from me; I lay it down on my own. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I received this commandment from my Father.”

When Jesus rebuked Peter for attacking the men who were arresting him, Jesus asked him, “Do you think that I can’t call on my Father right now, and He will send me more than twelve legions of angels?” (Mt. 26:53). His question reveals something not explicitly stated in the Bible, namely, while the Father did not accept Jesus’ desperate plea to find some other way to redeem mankind, He did tell Jesus that He would send angels to rescue him if he could not bear what he was about to suffer. Then, to confirm for Jesus that he had a choice, the Father knocked down the men who had come to Gethsemane to arrest him:

John 18

4. Jesus, knowing all things that were coming upon him, went out and said to them, “Who are you looking for?”
- 5a. They answered him, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus said to them, “I am he.”
6. Then, when he told them, “I am he,” they went backward and fell to the ground.

Jesus did not do that to those men. The Father did, to assure Jesus that he had a choice. The Father would not force His Son to go through what lay in store for him. But for our sake, the Son humbled himself and surrendered to Satan and his wicked band. “And so, the cohort, and the tribune, and the officers of the Jews took Jesus” (Jn. 18:12) and “led him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were gathered together” (Mt. 26:57).

Nobody heard God promise Jesus that He would send legions of angels to rescue him if he asked for them, and of those who heard Jesus say He did, how could anyone would have believed that God really made him such a promise? In the Temptation, Satan spoke of God assigning angels to watch over Jesus in case he so much as tripped over a rock (Lk. 4:10–11). Now, instead of sending angels to protect Jesus, God had sent Satan to kill him. How evil must Jesus have been in God’s sight, Satan and his sons thought (cf. Isa. 53:4), for God to change so drastically from His original, wonderful plan for the Messiah!

Selfless Love

God’s willingness to so patiently bear His deep grief as when He watched His Son’s agony is the most incredible expression of selfless love there has ever been. His great desire was for His Son to come back home and take his place openly beside Him, not only because they would then be reunited, but also because the life they shared would be shared with us. The Father would then have many sons and daughters, and Jesus would become, as Paul would say it, “the firstborn among many brothers” (Rom. 8:29).

If at any time during Jesus’ suffering, God had given an indication that He was displeased with what was happening, Satan would have put a quick end to it, but not out of compassion or a sense of justice. Satan had a self-serving motive for everything he did, and he would have gladly stopped men from killing Jesus if that is what he thought God wanted. He was motivated more by what he thought would please God than by personal hatred of Jesus. Some services to God must be done, such as the crucifixion of Jesus, but God will not ask good people or good spirits to do them. He did not put it on Peter, James, and John to crucify Jesus because He loved them and had chosen them for salvation. Instead, God used wicked men to crucify His Son, and they were glad to do it.

God’s perfect and terrifying patience determined everything.

The Love of God in Jesus

The reason that Satan was so sure he was pleasing God by killing Jesus is that Satan was pleasing himself by killing him and he saw God as “altogether such a one as himself”. In this, Satan’s sons were just like him. They, too, were certain they were pleasing God because they were pleasing themselves.

God *was* pleased with Jesus’ suffering and death, but it was not for the reason Satan and his sons thought. God was pleased because He knew that by the death of His Son, many would be delivered from spiritual darkness and come to know and love His Son and Him. God loved His Son beyond all measure, and His Son’s agony and cries from the cross tore at His heart, but the Father was willing to give him up for us, and Jesus was willing to be given. There is no greater love than that, no greater demonstration of goodwill toward us who were lost in sin. The depth of such love cannot be measured:

Romans 8

31. What, then, shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?
32. Indeed, He who did not spare His own Son, but gave him up for us all, how shall He not also, with him, freely give us all things?
33. Who shall bring an accusation against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies.
34. Who is the one that condemns? Christ is the one who died, but more than that, who was also raised up, who also is at God’s right hand, who also is making intercession for us.
35. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? *Will* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword
36. (as it is written, “For your sake, we are put to death all the day long; we are thought of as sheep for slaughter.”)
37. No! In all these things, we do more than conquer, through him who loved us.
38. I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,
39. nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord!

Holding the Door Open

When the disciples were sifted, they learned an invaluable lesson of spiritual life, namely, that we humans have no strength against either the spirits of this age or our own sinful nature and that the only appropriate attitude for us is abject humility and thanksgiving to God that “when we were yet without strength, Christ died for the ungodly” (Rom. 5:6). Without help from God, we can see nothing rightly, not God, not Jesus, not Satan, not even ourselves – perhaps especially ourselves, in the light of such scriptures as Jeremiah 17:9: “The heart is more deceitful than anything, and it is incurable. Who knows it?”

After God humbled Saul of Tarsus, he passed on a valuable warning, to wit, we must not trust in our own judgment of anyone or anything, including ourselves:

1Corinthians 4

3. To me, it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you, or by any human judgment; indeed, I do not even judge myself.
4. I am conscious of nothing against myself; however, by that, I am not justified. The Lord is the one who judges me.

5. So, judge nothing before the time, but wait until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and expose the intentions of hearts, and then from God will praise be given to each one.

God has never allowed Satan to learn this lesson, and He never will. Satan has always judged himself instead of waiting on God, and his damnation is set. God delivered Peter from his misguided opinion of himself and Peter became a new man in Christ, but He has condemned Satan to remain as he is forever. Most important, however, God is still God, and He is still, at this moment, holding the door open to us, full of compassion. God is still God, and He still, even in this covenant, uses Satan to accomplish His purpose, whenever He chooses to do so. Paul told the Corinthians that “a messenger of Satan” had been sent to trouble him with a “thorn in the flesh” (2Cor. 12:7b), but with that, Paul was not glorifying Satan’s power. He knew that God ordained that messenger to be sent, for that “thorn in the flesh” had a holy purpose, namely, to prevent Paul’s spirit from becoming puffed up by the many great gifts given to him (2Cor. 12:7c).

All Things Are Yours

Paul admonished the saints that God will turn over to Satan those of His household who persist in rejecting His gentler corrective measures. That may seem harsh, but such chastisement has a healing purpose. In one case, Paul turned certain men over to Satan for teaching a particularly bad doctrine, but then he said that God’s purpose for turning them over to Satan was to teach them not to do what they were doing (1Tim. 1:20). In other words, there was hope for them, and the punishment was intended to do them good by making them see they needed to change. The same may be said of the young man in Corinth who was living in sin with his step-mother (1Cor. 5:1). Paul commanded the elders there to turn him over to Satan, “for the destruction of the flesh, so that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1Cor. 5:5). For such wayward believers, it was a good thing that Satan was around for them to be turned over to him – if they learned from it to repent and do God’s will, which seems to have been the case with the young Corinthian (2Cor. 2:6–11). In Christ, not only do God’s faithful angels minister to us (Heb. 1:13–14), but Satan and his angels are our servants, too; they are never our masters. Paul told the Corinthians,

1Corinthians 3

21b. All things are yours,

22. whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things that are present, or things to come; all things are yours,

23. and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

So, even though God cast Satan and his angels out of heaven, God and they are still themselves. We humans are the ones who can change, but only because God is still willing to change us. And we should be very thankful for that; it will not always be that way. After the Final Judgment, no more changes will be allowed anywhere.

Remembers

SECTION 4: THE LAST SUPPER AND JESUS' ARREST

An Orderly, Measured Manner

- Perfect hatred, like perfect love, can wait. It watches and thinks as it moves in for the kill.

Satan in Judas

- No rule requires an evil spirit that possesses a person to stay inside that person continually. It is the person, not the spirit, who is in bondage.

Good Ideas

- Life is a matter of the heart; what you are in your heart determines the quality of whatever you do, no matter what you think you are doing.
- The gospel is not an opinion; it is a revelation.
- God has no opinions, and neither do the men He sends, for revelation delivers men from their opinions.
- There is no way but by revelation that the gospel can be preached. The truth cannot be found by study, not even by studying the Bible.
- The body of Christ is a family created by the power of God, impossible for man to enter except by the baptism that Jesus gives.
- The love of God is infused into our hearts by the Spirit, or we do not have it, no matter how nice we are.
- Every element of the kingdom of God is altogether in the Spirit, and no man, of himself, can contribute to it, take from it, or participate in it. And every time a man tries to help God run it, he sins.
- There is nothing more dangerous to your soul than a good idea put forth as gospel.
- Opinions about God are heresies.
- Every Christian church on earth originated with someone's good idea, someone's opinion who was "thinking to do God service", and every one of them is a lie.
- God has no ministers except those he sets on fire with his power, and no children except those who are led by His Spirit.
- Life in the Spirit is an impossible life for man, but Jesus made the impossible possible for us.

The Disciples Did Not Believe Jesus

- Men do not know themselves.
- Anyone who does something to you that causes you to press on and be obedient to the will of God is your friend.
- When a man's ways please God, He makes even his enemies his servants, using them only to do him good.
- God's love for us that determined everything.

SECTION 5: THE CRUCIFIXION

God Bowed the Heavens

- Though God remained silent when Jesus cried out to Him, He bent the heavens so that He would be close to him.
- God's self-restraint while watching His beloved Son suffer saved us.
- No one knew what was really happening at Calvary; everyone there was being used by God for a purpose so profound that no one could perceive it.

An Abject Failure?

- By any standard known to man, Jesus was an abject failure as Messiah.

Holding the Door Open

- We humans have no strength against either the spirits of this age or our own sinful nature.
- The only appropriate attitude for us is abject humility and thanksgiving to God that “when we were yet without strength, Christ died for the ungodly.”
- Without help from God, we can see nothing rightly.

All Things Are Yours

- In Christ, not only do God’s faithful angels minister to us, but Satan and his angels are our servants, too; they are never our masters.
- Though God cast Satan and his angels out of heaven, God and they are still themselves. We humans are the ones who can change, but only because God is still willing to change us.
- After the Final Judgment, no more changes will be allowed anywhere.