

The Power of Darkness

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Date: 22 March 2009

Preacher: Wayne Schuller

[0 : 01] Thanks Luke. Why don't we pray before we begin. Lord God give us our open hearts to your word. Make us teachable. Help us to be willing to change what we believe based on what you teach us in your word, what you say. And make us willing to change how we behave in light of your word and to honour Jesus Christ in all that we do. Amen.

Well, have you ever been stabbed in the back? Do you know how that feels? Ever been promised something by someone and they've done the complete opposite on you and left you exposed to ridicule? In short, have you ever been betrayed? Do you know what betrayal feels like? Ever had a friend promise to be there, to stand with you? I'll be there and they're not there and you've lost face.

Ever been deserted or hurt by a boyfriend or by a girlfriend or even by a husband or a wife? Have you ever observed the cataclysmic damage that can happen when a husband betrays a wife or a wife, a husband?

To me that's like an atomic bomb of betrayal. And the shrapnel hurts a lot more people than just the wife or the husband who's betrayed against. It goes far and wide.

Have you ever had your employer promise you a position or a job or a promotion and then give it to someone else? Have you ever been cheated?

[1 : 44] Doesn't feel good, does it? I think betrayal sucks. I think betrayal is one of my buttons. If you want to really push me, betrayal is something that will really get me.

Have you ever felt betrayed by a Christian leader who had this sort of image of this being this sort of godly kind of hero Christian and then you found out that that was actually just a facade, a lie.

They were putting up and actually the reality was the opposite. That strong sense of betrayal if you go through that. In my own marriage, I'm constantly just encouraging my wife Helen, she has all the freedom in the world, just be loyal to me.

And if you're not, you know that betrayal runs deep, I think. And there's sort of this lie going around, especially in kind of Australian society or Western society, that makes betrayal not as bad as it is.

There's this sort of thing going on where just because we're all individuals and we all make choices, that somehow we're justified if we want to change our mind on something.

[3 : 04] You can justify almost anything and there's no such thing after that as betrayal. There's just sort of a changed mind. I don't like this at all. So people argue we're just a bunch of autonomous individuals and we just make choices.

And you can't, they say, you can't enslave someone by yesterday's choices. If you want to change your mind today about whether you want to be with this person or in that marriage, you can change your mind.

It's just a new set of circumstances, new choices. You can't lock people in. That's what they say. And so therefore there's no such thing as betrayal. What they say is that feeling of anger that I have or that we have is simply an irrational, emotional reaction.

And then in time you'll get over it. You just need to sort of get over your little kind of insecurity and in time you'll work it out. And so do you see how that's actually a, if you like, a betrayal of the concept of betrayal?

That actually by just saying all that matters is your choice that you make today and you're not bound by anything that you promised yesterday, what that's actually saying is that there's no longer any real betrayal.

[4 : 25] There's no longer any real faithfulness. There's no longer any real commitment in any relationships. Well friends, you don't have to look very far to see that the damage of that view of individualism has made on our families and on our marriages and on our relationships.

You can't have communities where people don't hold by their word. You can't have good friendships where people don't keep their word, can you? And obviously you can't have good marriages where there's not loyalty, where there's not a commitment to stick with the person and not betray them.

So friends, I think you've really got to trust your gut on this issue. And as we read the story tonight of Jesus being betrayed, there's a sense in which you could try and read it with your head and just sort of try and excuse the betrayal, excuse Peter's denial, some people even try and excuse Judas.

But I actually think you ought to read it with your gut, your gut that says, betrayal is wrong, betrayal should not be. In the story tonight, there's going to be at least three groups of people who betray Jesus Christ, three groups at least.

And so you can read it with your head and sort of just make it hypothetical. You can read it with your heart and kind of your stomach and actually feel the pain that Jesus must have felt.

[5 : 59] Feel the rejection that Jesus must have felt. Feel the anger that Jesus must have felt. Feel the ugliness of betrayal. So let's go into it now.

Let's read it and feel it. Jesus is still in the garden. He's still praying and teaching his followers. He's still having that intimate moment in Gethsemane where he's sweating drops of blood.

And as he's speaking, the crowd came and led by the one called Judas. And Luke points out he's one of the twelve.

He is one of the twelve. He's one of the chosen ones. He's one of the apostles. He's one of the friends of Jesus. And famously, as we all know, he comes with that kind of Middle Eastern male hug and kiss kind of thing and he betrays his master with a kiss.

Now, Jesus here, we've got to get Jesus right here. There's a sense in which he submits to the power of darkness but he's stronger than it and he rebukes it along the way.

[7 : 08] So he says to Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man? Implicit in all that is, think of where you've come with me, Judas.

You were there at the Lord's Supper. You shared a table with me. You were there when I've taught you about the Son of Man that we saw about three weeks ago.

Jono taught us that the Son of Man will, in effect, Jesus will bring the end of the world. He's the Son of Man. That's a title that encapsulates the power he will have when he goes to the right hand of God and he will one day bring judgment day.

The Son of Man. And you want to betray him with a kiss. Judas is like the linchpin that starts the sort of chain of events that will lead to Jesus' arrest, his trial and his death, his crucifixion, his drowning in his own blood.

One of the twelve. One of the twelve will do it. Judas ought to receive salvation. He ought to be part of this new covenant. He was there when Jesus said twelve thrones of the kingdom of God.

[8 : 28] You will sit on twelve thrones. He was there as one of the twelve. And yet he takes a dark path. He takes the satanic path of betrayal. Jesus, see get this, Jesus does not think betrayal is a kind of emotional reaction that you'll get over.

To Jesus' betrayal is something very real to be rebuked. And remember Jesus' words about Judas. He said, Woe to the one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed.

Jesus takes betrayal very, very seriously. So I don't think I'm personally being insecure that I'm committed to loyalty in my relationships.

Because I think Jesus is committed to that, isn't he? And so anyway, by this point, the other disciples, they're kind of picking up what's happening.

There's a crowd. They've got swords. They come in to get Jesus. And they don't know what to do. So they say, What do we do, Jesus? Do we strike with the sword? Is this the time where you want us to fight?

[9 : 32] You told us to get a sword earlier in the chapter. Peter, and one of them, and we know this is actually Simon Peter, one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear.

Now, pretty gutsy really. I've never cut off anyone's ear. But Jesus says, No more of this. And amazingly, he touches the ear.

I don't know whether he had to pick the ear up off the ground and reattach it and heal the man. This is one of the guys who's going to arrest him, going to kill him.

It shows that Jesus is God, both in his power to heal, but also in his mercy and just the greatness of Jesus. He is God because he heals one of the people who are killing him.

He's going to send him to the cross. Although he's not a doormat because then he confronts this group. In verse 52, he says to the chief priests, the officers of the temple police and the elders who had come for him, have you come out with swords and clubs as if I were a bandit?

[10 : 41] When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me, but this is your hour, the power of darkness. This is Jesus' rebuke to the crowd, his indictment of them.

Why would they need to come armed as if Jesus is like, you know, carrying hidden weapons, concealed weapons or something? He's been a teacher of the kingdom of God.

He's been a proclaimer of love your enemies. He's been in the temple day after day. He hasn't been inciting riots. So why would they come in riot gear to arrest him?

It just shows their own corruption that they're actually scared. And they know it's wrong to arrest this man. And so they're coming with sort of the tools of men. And I think at a deeper level, these people, they're meant to be God's people.

They're meant to be, you know, they represent the high priests. They're temple officers. They're elders of God's people in Israel. They've been there.

[11 : 44] They ought to receive God's king. They ought to worship Jesus. In effect, they've sort of tolerated him teaching in the temple. They've heard his teaching and in a sense, they've sat under his teaching.

If it was wrong, they should have stood up and said it then. But here they come with their swords. It's another level of betrayal against the master. It's just another layer on the ugly betrayal.

And to sort of add insult to injury, they take Jesus to the house of the high priest who is probably Annas or his son-in-law Caiaphas, probably Annas at this point.

And so we've got this guy who in God's people, according to the Bible, he's the one who has access to God's house, to the temple of God. He's like at the top of the tree of the old covenant.

And yet, he's got here God incarnate and he's arresting him and taking him to his house. He ought to be worshipping Jesus. He ought to be saying to Jesus, here you are.

[12 : 55] We've been waiting for you all this time. You are here to break the veil and give access to God to everyone. So it's not just me who has access to the most holy place in the temple as great high priest, but you are going to open access to everyone.

I'm so glad you're here. But actually, he's the opposite, isn't he? He's betraying everything he ought to do by taking Jesus to himself as a prisoner to be killed.

Now, Jesus here is submitting to great evil, isn't he? what he calls it, this is your hour and the power of darkness.

Jesus knows that this is his mission and part of the mission of the salvation of his people is that Satan, the powers of darkness, sinful men, our sin in effect, the sin of humanity, will destroy the Son of God, will destroy God incarnate.

this is their hour. It's for the salvation of the world, but it's sort of an ugly moment. It's not a good moment. Now, Luke now focuses in on Peter because it seems that all the other disciples, they've just done a runner.

[14 : 14] They've realised that they're not going to be able to fight, so they've just done a runner, except for one, Peter. Peter. And what must have happened was as they arrested, you know, a crowd pulls a crowd and he's been taken to the high priest's house and the high priest would live in sort of a very large residence and there's a courtyard there and everyone goes into the high priest's courtyard.

So Peter, in effect, infiltrates the enemy following his master. You know, the people who are in that crowd, they want his blood.

They're there because they want to see what happens to this guy. They want to see him go and all the other disciples, they're not going to go anywhere near the people who have arrested Jesus. But Peter's kind of a covert.

He hides in the crowd. He hangs. He watches what's going to happen. You wonder whether he's remembered Jesus has warned him. He's going to deny Jesus. Jesus said, you'll deny me three times.

And so, you know, Jesus said, Satan wants to sift you like we. He wants to cut you up but I've prayed for you. Is Peter ready for the satanic attack? Well, here it comes. It comes in the form of a little girl.

[15 : 28] Verse 55, when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them. Then a servant girl or a slave girl, seeing him in the firelight, stared at him and said, this man was also, this man also was with him.

She points him out. She stares at him and she stares him down and names him. I don't think Peter was ready. Do you? I think maybe he had a scenario in his head that if a temple police officer put the sword to his neck and said, you were with him, weren't you?

Then maybe he had like a line ready for that. But he wasn't, he was caught off guard really. But what do you think that's happening? He lets sin answer for him. He answers selfishly and he lies.

He says, I do not know him. And of course, the same thing happens again a bit later, maybe an hour or so later. Another man says, you also are one of them.

But again, Peter's begun to lie. He's dwelt on the lie. He's quick to say, man, I'm not. Now Luke's readers, I think if you're reading Luke's gospel in the first century, you're living under the Roman Empire.

[16 : 41] Christianity's not illegal but it's sort of offensive and lots of Christians are being fed to lions and hung up as torches in Nero's garden. If you're reading Luke's gospel, they would know that this dynamic of once you start to lie and deny your faith, you've just got to keep lying and keep covering up.

There's no end to the lies that you will give. Little lies lead to escalate to bigger lies. Now let's think a moment about our own relationship with the Lord Jesus and how public that is.

How bold are you at standing up for Jesus and how quick are you to cover up? Maybe not, you might lie sometimes or maybe you don't lie but you just have a good way of steering the conversation away to something that's going to cause you to say something about your faith in Christ.

It doesn't take much to go from being a kind of sword-wielding, ear-chopping gospel soldier to a kind of scared-of-little-girls denier of Christ.

It doesn't take much to go from kind of your Sunday night bravado in Christ to your Monday morning embarrassed of Christ, does it?

[18 : 00] It doesn't take long at all. Today someone shared with me about they met an Iraqi Christian who was a church leader who was tortured in Iraq last year and they broke every kind of bone in the top half of his body almost and just smashed his face up to get him to renounce his faith in Christ and he didn't do it and now he's a refugee in Australia and Christians are looking after him.

I was very moved by that and I'm kind of humbled in a way because I've never faced that but we need to be open to that, don't we? We need to be willing to stand up for Christ and we don't do that in a way that's kind of like Peter when he said I'll die with you Jesus.

There's no chest thumping here. I know it's hard standing up for being a Christian. I know it's hard saying I worship Jesus Christ. I believe that what he said when he said is the way the truth and life the only way to God that's hard I know that's hard but we ought to be willing to make that commitment shouldn't we?

We ought to be willing to do that. We ought to be willing to pray that we would not fail the tests that come our way. Sometimes it's hard to know whether is God sending this test or is it a satanic attack?

Sometimes it's a bit of both but we ought to be willing to stand up for Christ. There might come a time in Melbourne where it'll be hard to come to an evening service. You all want to come at 10 o'clock because it gets dark at the evening service and there will be guys out there scratching your car or wanting to beat you up because you're a Christian so you'll come to church in the morning.

[19 : 43] When that day comes will you still be a Christian? Will you still be here? Or will you be ashamed? Will you have excuses? Probably more likely though than that scenario is that tomorrow morning you're going to be asked about your faith.

You're going to be asked what are you doing on the weekend? What are you doing over Easter? All religions are the same aren't they? Jesus was just a good teacher. All that matters is being a good person.

And if you give assent to such lies, well then you are betraying the Master, aren't you? You're betraying the Master. Let's go on and find what happens to Peter.

There's one more accusation, the intensity escalates, the intensity increases. And a guy comes along and he keeps insisting, surely this man was also with him for he is a Galilean.

And so Peter was there, he was the guy that chopped off the ear, a lot of people saw him and the fact that he's a Galilean is supporting evidence that he's a follower of Jesus of Nazareth who started up in Galilee.

[20 : 54] And as this accuser gets more definite, Peter's lies get more definite and his betrayal becomes stronger. I think you have this sense of, you know when you're at a party and there's lots of noise and someone just says something really kind of offensive and the whole room just goes quiet and everyone's looking at you?

I think that's what it's like around this fire. You were definitely with him because you're a Galilean, everyone's quiet looking at him and maybe up in the kind of gallery of the residents where they're interrogating Jesus, he's up there somewhere, maybe some of the soldiers are looking down at Peter and so he says, man I do not know what you are talking about and he denies Jesus that third time and while he was still speaking, the cock crowed and this is a real surprise I think and this is only in Luke's gospel in verse 61 it says, the Lord turned and looked at Peter.

So maybe the Lord is up there in the gallery and they're down in the courtyard or maybe they're finished with him in this house and they're taking him out to see Caiaphas and so as he's coming past that's just when Peter denies him and then the Lord looks at him in the eye.

Imagine how that would feel to deny your Lord and then have him look at you in the eye. Peter remembered the word of the Lord how he had said to him, before the cock crows today you will deny me three times and Peter went out and wept bitterly.

Peter goes out and weeps bitter tears of repentance for being such a betrayer of the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. He weeps tears of bitterness for betraying God incarnate, Jesus Christ.

[22 : 45] And so now Jesus is really alone. There's not anyone hanging around and they basically in this last two, three verses bash him up, spit on him and play a game with him and the game is called prophesy.

And the idea is he's blindfolded and there's maybe five soldiers and they all have a crack at him in his face and they say prophesy who hit you. It's ironic really because Peter has just experienced the fulfilment of Jesus' prophecy in the cock crowing and the denial.

Jesus just proved that he is God, that he predicts the future. And in fact earlier in Luke's gospel he actually says it explicitly. Jesus says, I'll be handed over to the Gentiles, I'll be mocked and insulted and spat on.

And now he's not over to the Gentiles yet but the mocking is happening, the spitting is happening, the torture is happening that Jesus prophesied. So as they hit him and say prophesy, well he has and you are fulfilling it.

Do you see the irony there? It's exactly like Matt was teaching last week. Jesus said he had to drink the cup. What's the cup? The cup is the judgment of God.

[24 : 01] The cup is the wrath of God, not against Jesus but the wrath of God against us. It's the judgment we deserve. He's starting to drink that cup and it's going to go all the way to the cross of Christ.

He alone will drink it. It's a path that our saviour walked alone. No one's hanging around, no one's supporting him. He's going it alone. Peter is long gone.

We have a great saviour, don't we? He's a great saviour that he would do that for our forgiveness. That he would do that so that every person here tonight can call on his name and be saved and have the hope of heaven and have every sin washed away.

He's a great saviour that he would go through that for us. But we do need to come back to what does it mean for our denials? What does it mean for our faith in Christ in the workplace and at school and at uni and on our street and everywhere we go and in our wider family?

What does it mean for being a Christian and wearing the name of Christ? I want to say really clearly tonight friends that I don't think this story is here to encourage us in our denials of Jesus.

[25 : 21] I don't actually think it's here to say, you know, they're there, it's okay, you deny Jesus around the water cooler at work, so did Peter. I don't think that's why Luke includes this story or why every gospel includes this story.

This story is about the betrayal with a capital B, the betrayal of God, the Son of God by all humanity and it happened for the redemption of humanity.

It was in effect, it's a one-off event, it's Jesus path to glory through the cross, through suffering, through betrayal and then he rises from the dead, he sends to heaven, that's the gospel and so the denial of Jesus by Peter is just part of the gospel.

I don't think Luke puts it forward as a kind of pat on the back and a kind of a comfort to us if we deny Christ during the week. Jesus, he's at the right hand of God, he's King of Kings and Lord of Lords, he was not in that position at this point but he's gone through the cross, he's gone through the resurrection, he's gone to the right hand of God, he's the world's true master, he's to be obeyed, no more betrayed, he's the world's true master, to be obeyed, no more betrayed.

It was a path he had to take, the path of betrayal was the path he had to take to save us but the time of betrayal has ended, the time of betrayal has ended.

[26 : 59] I mean think about it, think about the early church, think about Peter in the book of Acts, do you see Peter doing that in the book of Acts? The book of Acts, once he realises where Jesus is at the right hand of God and poured out the spirit, he's on the front line of suffering for the name of Christ.

In fact it's with a confrontation with the high priest and these same people that he makes that famous statement where he says that there is salvation in no one else, there's no other name given to people under heaven by which we can be saved.

He says that right to their face. He's no longer ashamed of Christ after the resurrection. Think about what Peter writes in his letters to us.

They're in the New Testament, 1 Peter, 2 Peter. Does he sort of do that kind of daggy preacher thing going you know, don't do what I did but if you do there's forgiveness.

He doesn't talk like that. This is how he talks. He says, Do not fear what they fear. 1 Peter 3. Do not fear what they fear. Do not be intimidated but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord.

[28 : 10] Set apart Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you. This is quite a lot really if you think about coming from the guy who denied Christ to a little girl and denied him three times.

Now he teaches, always be ready to give an account. When anyone asks you, don't lie, don't deny, he doesn't have that option.

He says, always be ready to anyone who asks you whether they be police or media or friends or people that you respect. Always be ready to give an account for your faith in Jesus Christ.

Always and to anyone. not just when you feel safe, even when you feel in danger, even when you feel it's going to get you killed. Give an account for the hope you have in Christ.

Now I'm sure Peter never forgot what he went through. I'm sure he never forgot that look in the eyes. But you know, you think about it. He also looked in Jesus' eyes when he rose from the dead.

[29 : 20] He also looked in Jesus' eyes when he saw Jesus ascend. back to heaven, as it were, and was taken up in the cloud. Peter lived knowing that the eyes of Jesus Christ look down on him from the right hand of God, where he sits reigning the universe.

And they're the same eyes of Jesus Christ that look on you and look on me. So friends, my challenge tonight is to always be ready to give an answer to anyone and to never betray Christ.

Never betray Christ. Carry the name. Carry the name of Christ. Jesus had to be deserted and now he's risen from the dead.

Our job is to go sort of the same path, isn't it? It's to suffer for his name and we'll one day be vindicated in the day of judgment, in the resurrection, and then we'll share eternal life with him.

He will provide all we need to stand up for his name. It will all be by grace, all be by the power of his spirit. He will give us the strength we need to bear his name.

[30 : 37] When people you know, your friends start bagging Christianity, don't betray the master, don't change the topic. Stand up for him. When people ask you, you know, what is Good Friday about?

You're not one of those kind of Good Friday wowsers, are you? Don't betray the master. When the group is going to do something that's disobedient to the Lord Jesus, maybe something immoral or whatever, you know, take a stand and tell them why you're taking it.

Tell them it's because of Jesus Christ, because you believe he is Lord. You may not be eloquent in how you stand up as a Christian. You may not always have the right answers, but you need to resolve today to be unwavering in your allegiance to Christ.

I'll close with this quote from one of my heroes, John Calvin. He's writing in the 16th century in a time where his life was threatened a lot for his faith in the Christ of the Bible.

Here's what John Calvin says. If in the presence of wicked scorners of God and enemies of the gospel, if we deny or cheat Christ of his due testimony, we expose his sacred name to the ridicule of all.

[32 : 03] Just listen to the language here. He's saying, don't cheat Christ of his due testimony as king of kings and lord of lords. He says, denial of Jesus is quite beyond excuse.

It's robbing God of his due service and robbing Christ of his honour. Take this point. As soon as one departs from a simple and sincere profession of Christ, one robs him of his rightful witness.

Now, you are here tonight because you are privileged. You are here because you have access to the gospel. You have access to a Christian church. You have access to a Bible.

Many of us, you know, you wear the name of Christ in your baptism. You've been given the secrets of the kingdom of heaven. You've been given much.

Don't betray your master. Don't rob Christ of the honour that is due to him. Don't dishonour him or cheat him of his due testimony.

[33 : 19] Resolve today. Resolve right now. Plead forgiveness. Plead grace as I need to do for the times I have denied Christ. But resolve today to carry the name.

Resolve today to wear the name of Christ. Come what may. Come what may. He will give all strength you need. He will take care of you.

Even if you die, you'll rise with him in glory. There is nothing that people can take from you that he cannot give back a hundredfold. But friends, do you believe it?

Do you believe that he is now King of kings and Lord of lords? That is where he said he would be. That is where the apostles saw him go. And that is where we proclaim him to be.

So if it is true, then do not be ashamed of your master. He's here now. He's looking on us. Let us pray to him. Lord Jesus, we give you due honour.

[34 : 20] We thank you for your death and resurrection. We thank you that these are not only historical facts, they are world shattering truths.

And we thank you, Lord Jesus, that you are King of kings and Lord of lords, seated at the right hand of God the Father. Lord Jesus, spare us from kind of the false bravado or chest thumping.

Help us to embrace humiliation for your sake. Help us to take up our cross and follow you. Lord Jesus, please do forgive us through your blood.

Please forgive us for when we have been ashamed. Please show mercy on us. Lord Jesus, look on us as you looked on Peter, not only to convict but also to impart grace.

and by your spirit to give us grace and mercy and strength to carry your name. Amen.