

## Stop, Look and Listen

HN/SS 19/2/06 am

Reading: Jeremiah 17:1-18, John 13

Study Text: John 13:22-30

Sing Psalms: 138, 22, 139

Many children have just started school for the first time. Parents are taking them to school in the morning and picking them up in the afternoon. But soon they will be walking to school on their own. To do this they may need to cross a busy road. This can be very dangerous. Wise parents will teach them how to cross the road safely. Do you remember how? Stop, look and listen. In the passage before us we see the disciples doing just this, after Jesus made the shattering announcement that one of them would betray him.

Jesus was eating the Passover with his disciples and everything seemed fine to them. But Jesus started saying things that did not make a lot of sense to them. He was troubled and started talking about being betrayed – by one of their number! They could not imagine such a thing. One of them betray their master – never! But Jesus was always right. Who could it be? They were perplexed (literally ‘without a way’); they were at a loss as to which of them he was referring to.

### Stop

The words of Jesus made his disciples stop and think. They looked at one another – who is it they asked. And they had to ask themselves – could it be me. They started to examine their own hearts. Notice how Peter shortly afterwards declared *I will lay down my life for you* (13:37).

These disciples who shortly beforehand were arguing about who was the greatest were now examining their relationship to Jesus. These disciples who shortly beforehand had been too proud to wash one another’s feet were now confronted by the fact that one of them was a betrayer. Things were not as they appeared to be.

Moreover they were confronted by the truth that Jesus knew their hearts. Jesus knows the hearts of all men (2:24). He had already told them that one of them was a devil (6:70). The time had come for hearts to be examined. Jesus was intent on revealing his betrayer if he continued in his hypocrisy. If he chose to turn from his evil intentions this was the time to do so, the time to stop and turn from evil.

We might remember an incident that happened just after Israel entered Canaan (Joshua 7). In the strength of the Lord they defeated Jericho but when they went up to attack Ai they suffered defeat. This was a devastating blow to Joshua and all the people of God. They were stopped in their tracks. They tore their clothes and put dust on their heads. How could this be they asked. They were forced to examine themselves. Then one by one the Lord examined them until the betrayer of the covenant was identified.

Lots of people are getting worried about cameras spying on their every move these days. On the roads, on the streets, in the shops, cameras are everywhere! Satellite cameras can even see

into your backyard. It can be very disconcerting. Jesus did not need such technology to know where Nathaniel was (John 1). But what can be more disconcerting is that Jesus knows our hearts. He said to Nathaniel *Behold a true Israelite in whom there is no deceit*. Nathaniel was taken aback. *How do you know* m~~he~~ asked? He had never met Jesus.

One day all hearts will be opened before the Lord. The secrets of all hearts will be revealed. Through Jeremiah God declared *I the Lord search the heart, I test the mind* (Jeremiah 17:10). *God will judge the secrets of men's hearts by my gospel* wrote Paul (Romans 2:16). And again the Lord said to the church at Thyatira *I am he who searches the minds and hearts says the Son of God* (Revelation 2:23). The Lord knows your heart, and one day he will expose all that is hidden therein. Don't you think it wise to repent before then, and have your secret sins erased, covered entirely and forever in the blood of Jesus Christ?

If the disciples were made to search their hearts at this the last Passover and the first Lord's Supper, then should we not also examine our hearts as we come to the Lord's table! Indeed Scripture commands that we do. *Let a man examine himself and so let him eat of this bread and drink of this cup* (I Corinthians 11:28).

How do we examine ourselves? It is very simple really – so why don't we do it? It is as simple as crossing the road. The rules are the same. Stop, look and listen. What happens to the child who chases the ball onto the road without stopping? Bang. Life is gone. So it is in the spiritual life – those who fail to stop and examine themselves die.

Jesus made his disciples stop and think – *one of you will betray me*. He wants you to do the same. He has given us one day in seven to do so. Satan of course does not want you to stop and think. Keep working he says, keep that money coming in so you will be happy, keep watching that T.V., keep running here and there. 'Whatever you do' says Satan 'don't stop and think about your life'.

## Look

The second thing we must do is look. Look at what? Look at your heart of course. But how do we do that? With the help of God's word and the Holy Spirit. Peter, the impetuous Peter, looked to Jesus seeking to know who it was who would betray him. Jesus knew so ask him – that was Peter's thinking. You can do the same.

The scene here is interesting. They were all reclining around the table. – not sitting as pictured in the famous artwork by Leonardo da Vinci. They rested on their left elbow as they took food and ate with their right hand. Peter must have been somewhere opposite Jesus for he motioned to John who could lean back on Jesus (13:25). Far from being in a position of primacy among the apostles Peter had to rely on the intercession of John (the disciple whom Jesus loved is almost universally identified with John).

With a nod of the head or some such gesture Peter prompted John to ask Jesus who he was talking about. John leant back and quietly asked Jesus *Lord who is it?* Jesus answered him, apparently in a whisper, for the others did not understand what was going on, even when Judas got up to leave. For some reason John did not share his knowledge with the rest of the disciples. But he did ask the question and he was given an answer.

Whenever you earnestly look to Jesus for answers you will find them – that is his promise. *Everyone who asks receives and he who seeks finds* (Matthew 7:8). The answers of Jesus are in the Bible, the word of God. The Bible is like a mirror to your soul. You see your heart, your true self when you read the Bible. Nothing is hidden in the mirror that is God's word.

You will not like what you see. That is why many fear to look into this Book – the word of God that is *living and powerful, sharper than a two edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, a discernner of the thoughts and intents of the heart* (Hebrews 4:12). But such fear, fear of the truth about yourself, will lead to death. If you do not look you walk each day in great danger. Death may crush you at anytime. And then all will be revealed before the judgment seat of Christ.

## Listen

Having looked into the mirror do not go away and forget what you saw (James 1:23, 24). When you look and see a bus coming you do not ignore what you see – how foolish, how dangerous. You do what is needed to avoid death. You listen when the bus blows its horn at you. You turn from your path and seek a place of safety.

Judas refused to listen. Jesus held the mirror up to his soul as he passed him the piece of bread he had dipped in some sauce. But rather than turn, rather than listen to Jesus, he gave himself into the hands of the devil. Satan entered him, he went out immediately and it was night. What a tragic night it was for this man. Jesus reached out to him but he went out into the darkness.

Having looked into the mirror you must act. *What shall we do* the people cried out as Peter preached the gospel at Pentecost (Acts 2:37). They were cut to the heart by this living word. And their cry was answered – repent and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

This mirror that is the word of God is a talking mirror. This is a mirror that tells you what you must do. It not only reveals what you are, but shows what you can be, and must be if you are to escape condemnation. By the power of the Holy Spirit you can change what you see. You can look and see the perfection of Jesus Christ, for when you believe in Jesus Christ you are clothed in his righteousness. *We know that when he is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is* (I John 3:2).

As you examine you heart, as I exhort you to do, remember this scene in the upper room. Twelve men, alldisciples of Jesus, yet one of them was a devil. Jesus' words caused them to stop and examine their hearts – *who is it?* Satan was there also, his foot in the door to Judas' heart. Judas was not the first to let him in, nor was he the last. Satan continues to lead many souls into darkness. Many have no peace in their hearts because of him. Happy is the person who really believes that there is a devil, and believing watches and prays that he may be kept from temptation.

*Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon*