

Decide Beforehand

Loving the Unlovable Series, April 2 & 3, 2022 | John 13:21-30

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DECISIONS MATTER IN LOVE

In this series we are thinking about loving the unlovable.

Loving the unlovable sounds difficult, but Jesus calls us to love the unlovable.

In week one we saw that when we know who we are, we can love the unlovable.

In week two we saw that when we love the unlovable, we should expect tough days, but if we are prepared for tough days, then we can still love the unlovable.

We have consistently broadened our definition of "unlovable."

The "unlovable" are the people we don't want to love and who are difficult to love. They are people who are against us or who hurt us.

The "unlovable" even include people who are different from us and make us uncomfortable.

The "unlovable" sometimes include people who were easy to love at one time but who have become difficult to love for one reason or another. Neighbors, friends, family members, and even spouses can become unlovable. They were lovable at one time but have become difficult to love.

Decisions matter in loving people, but terms like "falling in love" imply that we have no decisions to make in love.

I've told you before about the day I fell in love with my wife, Tammi.

We had been dating for a while and were having a wonderful time together.

One Saturday morning, we were planning to go somewhere together.

As I was getting ready to pick Tammi up, I remember being incredibly happy. I couldn't put my finger on why, but that morning I realized, "I love her. I love Tammi."

I suddenly felt incredibly goofy and happy. I had fallen in love.

"Falling in love" implies that we are out of control and have no decisions to make.

If we have no decisions to make, then loving unlovable people would be impossible.

However, we do have decisions to make when it comes to love.

Decisions matter in love, particularly in loving the unlovable.

When we decide beforehand, we can love even when someone becomes unlovable.

This concept is critical to our happiness in the closest relationships in our lives.

It's also essential to our effectiveness for Jesus.

Today, as we return to John 13, we will contrast Judas' decisions with Jesus' decisions.

We will examine Jesus' example and teachings to learn more about the role decisions have in loving others, particularly the unlovable.

JUDAS DECIDED TO BETRAY JESUS

John 13:21 starts with the phrase, "After saying these things ..." What has Jesus said and done so far?

John 13 begins with Jesus' gathering with his disciples for one last meal before his crucifixion.

The disciples' feet were dirty, and it was customary for someone to wash their feet, but no one was willing to do that hard work except Jesus.

Jesus washed his disciples' feet. Even Judas' feet.

Then Jesus told the disciples to follow his example and love others practically and sacrificially.

But Jesus spoke about a disciple who was not clean and who would betray him.

Now let's read John 13:21-30:

After saying these things, Jesus was troubled in his spirit, and testified, "Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me." The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he spoke. One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was reclining at table at Jesus' side, so Simon Peter motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. So that disciple, leaning back against Jesus, said to him, "Lord, who is it?" Jesus answered, "It is he to whom I will give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it." So when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. Then after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, "What you are going to do, do quickly." Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. Some thought that, because Judas had the moneybag, Jesus was telling him, "Buy what we need for the feast," or that he should give something to the poor. So, after receiving the morsel of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.

Judas considered a plot to betray Jesus before this night.

After arriving in Jerusalem with Jesus for the Passover, Judas got serious about the thought.

The Jewish religious leaders were actively looking for a way to kill Jesus. They were afraid of the crowds, so they needed a way to get Jesus away from the crowds. Judas was their way.

Luke 22:3-6 tells us how far Judas had gone:

Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve. He went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray him to them. And they were glad, and agreed to give him money. So he consented and sought an opportunity to betray him to them in the absence of a crowd.

Judas came to the Last Supper with Satan in his heart and betrayal on his mind.

Judas came to his moment of decision at supper.

Jesus knew what was happening and what Judas was thinking.

Jesus told everyone that one of them was going to betray him.

The disciples were surprised. Peter asked John the beloved disciple who was seated next to Jesus to ask about the identity of the betrayer. Jesus told John that he would identify the betrayer by taking bread, dipping it, and giving it to the culprit. He gave the bread to Judas.

John 13: 27 indicates that when Judas took the bread from Jesus, that was the moment when Judas made his decision:

"Then after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him. ..."

Satan was in control of Judas, and Judas left quickly to get the job done.

Judas acted on his decision and betrayed Jesus.

After supper, Jesus and the remaining disciples went to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray.

Matthew 26:47-50 tells us what happened next:

While [Jesus] was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a great crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man; seize him." And he came up to Jesus at once and said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" And he kissed him. Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you came to do." Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and seized him.

Judas made the decision to betray Jesus and acted on that decision.

JESUS DECIDED BEFOREHAND TO LOVE THE UNLOVABLE

Jesus' disciples were consistently confused.

Even after receiving a direct indication from Jesus that it was Judas, they didn't understand why Judas had left the meal.

They thought Judas might be taking a gift from their treasury to give to the poor.

The disciples were confused.

Jesus, by contrast, knew exactly what was happening.

Jesus knew the identity of his betrayer all along.

For anyone who was paying careful attention, Jesus stated it bluntly.

When John asked at the Last Supper, Jesus immediately identified Judas.

Jesus knew the identity of his betrayer and exactly what was happening around him.

Jesus remained in charge.

When Jesus handed Judas the piece of bread that he had dipped in the bowl, Satan entered Judas. Jesus had to feel the presence of the enemy.

Without hesitation, Jesus commanded Judas to go and do what had to be done. In so doing, Jesus himself set in motion the chain of events that would lead to his own death.

He was betrayed, but he was not a victim. Jesus had made a decision.

Jesus decided beforehand what he would do when the time came.

Jesus decided to take on human flesh, knowing what would happen and why.

He decided beforehand that he would welcome Judas into his life.

As this night approached, the weight of it all was heavy for Jesus. But he had decided, and he stuck by his decision. In **John 12:27** Jesus said:

"Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour."

Jesus decided beforehand that he would love his unlovable betrayer. He decided beforehand that he would wash Judas' feet. Knowing first century Jewish customs, many commentators believe Jesus made Judas the guest of honor at this meal.

As we read about this night, we recognize that Jesus fully accepted and embraced the will of the Father once again. Jesus decided to love the unlovable at great expense to himself.

GOD DECIDED BEFOREHAND TO LOVE THE UNLOVABLE

The words "supralapsarianism" and "infralapsarian" remind us that God decided beforehand to love the unlovable. The words "supralapsarian" and "infralapsarian" are technical theological terms.

They're big words seminary students like to throw around at parties to impress their friends.

The two words describe when God decided logically to love the unlovable and save some of us. They don't necessarily have to do with time but with a decision God made before time.

Did God decide to save some of us in Christ before he decided to create the world and allow the fall? (That's supralapsarianism.) Or did he decide to save some of us in Christ after he decided to create the world and allow the fall? (That's infralapsarianism.)

I have no desire for you to remember the words or the distinction. What I want you to see is that God's decision to love the unlovable was beforehand in every way.

The Bible is clear that God decided before Jesus' incarnation, life, and death to love the unlovable.

I'm not looking to get into divisive questions like predestination versus free will.

I just want you to see how God decided beforehand to love unlovable sinners. In **Ephesians 1:3-4** Paul writes:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. ...

God decided beforehand to love the unlovable.

God decided beforehand to love you. Let's go back to God's Story just to illustrate.

In chapter 1, Creation, God made the world and everything in it. He created the world and us out of love for us so that we could be with him.

In chapter 2, Brokenness, we sinned and disobeyed God. We betrayed him. We broke our relationship with him, we broke ourselves, we broke each other, and we broke the world around us. We made ourselves unlovable to God in every way possible. We can't save ourselves. But God decided to love us and save us.

Then in chapter 3, Jesus, God the Father sent God the Son to take on human flesh. God the Son obeyed because he had decided much, much earlier to come. Jesus lived a perfect and sinless life because he had decided much, much earlier to obey his Father. Jesus allowed himself to be betrayed, be crucified, and die to pay the price for our sin, so that we could be forgiven because he had decided beforehand to love the unlovable.

What is your response to God's decision? Will you accept the love that God has offered you?

And will you allow the love that God has offered you to become the basis for your loving the unlovable yourself? Because at one point or another, we are all surrounded by the unlovable.

THREE REASONS TO DECIDE BEFOREHAND TO LOVE THE UNLOVABLE

1. Reacting in the moment doesn't work.

We already know that unlovable people will come into our lives.

Plus, people we love now will become unlovable for seasons at least. It's just going to happen.

If we don't decide beforehand what we will do when the unlovable come into our lives or lovable people suddenly become unlovable, then we will handle the moment badly.

Reacting in the moment is always a pathway to disaster. Preparing for the inevitable is wise.

Deciding ahead of time to love the unlovable will help us in the moment to choose to love.

2. Responding to someone who is unlovable reveals our resolve to love.

I learned that when I tried running for the first time in my 20s.

I said that I had a resolve to run, but rainy days, hot days, and cold days revealed the truth.

Any time I saw someone running in the rain, I thought to myself, "Get in out of the rain!" Consequently, I never went running when it was raining.

I hate running in the heat, and I'm not a big fan of running in the cold.

A friend pointed out that I only really liked to run on partly cloudy days when the temperature was between 55 and 70 degrees.

That said a lot about my resolve to run. I didn't have any. So, I quit until I was almost 40.

When we come into contact with a person who is unlovable and when a loved person becomes unlovable, how we respond says a lot about our resolve to love the unlovable. If we lose our tempers quickly, walk away easily, and give up without a fight, then we really don't have much resolve to love the unlovable at all.

Deciding beforehand strengthens our resolve to love even the unlovable.

3. Deciding beforehand to love the unlovable obeys Jesus' commands.

Jesus is not subtle. In **Matthew 5:43-44** Jesus says bluntly,

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you ..."

Love your enemies. Love the unlovable. It's Jesus' command.

LET'S DECIDE BEFOREHAND TO LOVE THE UNLOVABLE

That doesn't mean we decide beforehand to participate in sin or submit to abuse.

Jesus' command to love the unlovable does not mean he commands us to sin. We can never use Jesus' commands to love as reasons to sin.

Nor does Jesus command us to stay in abusive relationships. Jesus may command us to put ourselves in danger to love (particularly the unlovable), but that does not equal a command to stay in abusive relationships.

However, let's decide beforehand to love the unlovable because everyone becomes unlovable.

I learned this through a group of friends that are very dear to me.

Tammi and I joined a small group when everyone involved had oldest children turning 13.

For a while, everyone was polite.

Then we studied a book on boundaries with teenagers. We started to talk honestly about raising teens. We all had kids with ups and downs and marriages with ups and downs. And we all thought everyone else was perfect and that we alone were messes! It was a very liberating experience to learn that none of us was alone.

We're all messes. We're all broken. I prefer the broad, pejorative category, "crazy." We're all crazy. We can keep our craziness under wraps for a while, but crazy is going to come out if we're in a relationship for long enough.

What are you going to do in that moment? You can turn and walk away for good from the relationship, or you can stay.

We can't build lasting relationships if we walk away every time someone becomes unlovable.

Let's decide beforehand to love the unlovable because everyone becomes unlovable.

Let's decide beforehand to love the people close to us when they become unlovable.

Let's decide beforehand to love our spouses even when they are unlovable. If we're doing life that closely with someone, then that person at times will become difficult to love. If we are going to build marriages that thrive for a lifetime, and if we are going to reflect Christ to our spouses the way the Bible calls us to, then we must decide beforehand to love them even when they are unlovable.

Let's decide beforehand to love our family members even when they are unlovable. Family members require the same kind of forgiveness, mercy, and grace that spouses do.

Let's decide beforehand to love our friends even when they are unlovable.

Let's decide beforehand to love our neighbors even when they are unlovable. People where we live, work, and play get the least room to frustrate, disappoint, and hurt us. However, those are the relationships in which deciding beforehand to love makes the biggest difference. If we decide beforehand to love them, we show them what Christ is really like.

Let's decide beforehand to love the unlovable.

Let's decide beforehand to love lovable people when they are unlovable.

Let's decide beforehand to love people who are different and make us uncomfortable.

Let's decide beforehand to love people who are difficult, bothersome, and even hurtful.

Let's decide beforehand to love our enemies.

When we decide beforehand, we are much more likely to follow through on that decision when faced with pressure to react angrily, walk away, and give up.

When we decide beforehand, people see Christ's image in us.