

Easter Message Betrayed - Judas, John 18:1-9

Today, as we are approaching the Easter season, we will consider the sad story of the Lord Jesus' betrayal and arrest in John chapter 18, verses 1 to 9. Although it is a sad story, I hope you will see that there is much in it to encourage us as we focus on the Lord Jesus' care for His own. It's not a long passage, so I'll read it out now from the New King James Version:

"When Jesus had spoken these words, He went out with His disciples over the Brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which He and His disciples entered. And Judas, who betrayed Him, also knew the place; for Jesus often met there with His disciples. Then Judas, having received a detachment [of troops], and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, came there with lanterns, torches, and weapons. Jesus therefore, knowing all things that would come upon Him, went forward and said to them, "Whom are you seeking?" They answered Him, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus said to them, "I am [He]." And Judas, who betrayed Him, also stood with them. Now when He said to them, "I am [He]," they drew back and fell to the ground. Then He asked them again, "Whom are you seeking?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus answered, "I have told you that I am [He]. Therefore, if you seek Me, let these go their way," that the saying might be fulfilled which He spoke, "Of those whom You gave Me I have lost none.""

No doubt you are pretty familiar with the Easter story, including the arrest of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. Perhaps however, with familiarity comes some loss of the sense of horror we should feel about the betrayal by Judas. Judas, who had spent three years as one of the twelve close disciples of Jesus, who had heard Him speak and seen Him perform miracles of grace and healing, was now with a large group of soldiers and enemies of Jesus, "becoming a guide to those who arrested Jesus," as Peter says in Acts chapter 1 verse 16. Peter goes on to say in the following verse, "for he was numbered with us and obtained a part in this ministry." What a terrible change! He had been numbered with the twelve apostles, closely associated with them all. So how could such a person become a traitor? What led to his downfall?

The Bible is not silent on the matter, because we have a clue earlier on in John's Gospel, in chapter 12. In this chapter, verses 1 to 8, we read about Mary, the sister of Lazarus, the one who had been raised from the dead. Mary anointed the Lord Jesus' feet with some expensive and precious perfume. We find out that Judas was unhappy about this, as we can read from John chapter 12 verses 4-6:

"But one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's [son], who would betray Him, said, "Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it. "

Evidently, Judas had been helping himself to the communal funds, and in this episode at Mary's house in Bethany, he saw a missed opportunity for some personal gain. He was pretty good at valuing the perfume and he was irritated at seeing it being wasted in such a fashion, as he thought. We can perhaps get some idea of the value of that ointment from one of Jesus' parables, when He spoke about workers in a vineyard who bargained with the vineyard owner for a denarius as a day's wages. Assuming that this was a reasonable estimate of the current rate for a day's labour in those times, we can see, then, that three hundred denarii would have been quite a tidy sum, in Judas' estimation - it was nearly a year's wages.

You may have heard the saying that "money is the root of all evil," which is a sort of mis-quote from the Bible. The Bible doesn't actually say that **money** is the root of all evil. In Paul's first letter to Timothy, chapter 6 and verse 10, we read, "For the love of money is a root of all [kinds of] evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." You will note that it is not the money itself which is a root of evil, but rather it is the **love** of it. From what we can tell, the love of money seemed to have taken possession of Judas.

Now roots are generally not visible, but they are nevertheless very important. I remember seeing a photograph of an apple tree that presumably had been painstakingly excavated and its root system reconstructed. It was quite remarkable. The whole tree looked a bit like a dumbbell, with the trunk supporting the branches and leaves, and these branches and leaves pretty much mirrored in a similarly-shaped mass of roots coming from the base of the trunk. When that apple tree was growing in the soil, we would effectively have only seen half of the tree. Invisible to us, below the ground, the extensive root system was supporting, feeding and supplying water to the tree. Without them, it wouldn't have survived.

In the case of the apple tree, of course, the roots were good and essential. The production of nice apple fruit would depend on them. This kind of picture is used as a metaphor in Isaiah chapter 37 verse 31, where we read of a group of people who "would take root downward, and bear fruit upward." Similarly, in Proverbs chapter 12 verse 12 we read that "the root of the righteous yields [fruit]." In Judas's case, by contrast, the root was evil and therefore the fruit was evil. He had allowed himself to become possessed by the love of money, and this evil root within him led to his evil outward doings.

We don't know for how long this theft from the common purse had been going on, but one assumes for quite some time. Presumably at the start of his discipleship he had been an honest treasurer, but he had allowed himself to slide into evil. Evidently, a tipping point was reached, perhaps when Mary anointed Jesus' feet with the precious oil, and he was then willing to betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. And so we see the former disciple now at the head of a group of soldiers and enemies of Jesus, acting as their guide in order to betray Him. What a tragic picture!

Let's turn from this sad spectacle and instead focus our attention on the Lord Jesus, so that we can be encouraged by His love and devotion to us. We saw that Jesus had crossed the Brook Kidron and gone into a garden, which He was evidently known to use frequently. From this comment, we can see that from the outset, Jesus had not intended hiding Himself or evading capture. He went willingly to His arrest, and then on to His death, and as we'll see shortly, this only happened because He allowed it to happen. He knew that if you and I were to be saved, there was no other option. Such a consideration really helps us to know that we are greatly loved, even if our present circumstances might seem very adverse.

It was a large group of soldiers that had come to arrest the Lord Jesus. They came with lanterns, torches and weapons, so it would seem that they were expecting some trouble, or at least they were taking precautions against it. What a contrast, then, when we read, "Jesus therefore, knowing all things that would come upon Him, went forward and said to them, "Whom are you

seeking?"" This shows His marvellous bravery and self-composure, particularly since He knew what would happen. It is wonderful that we have such a Person as our Saviour. We cannot rely upon ourselves, or our own courage, but we can definitely rely upon Him. In John chapter 10, verses 15 and 18, the Lord Jesus said, "As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. ... No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father." He wasn't going to be taken by force, against His will, as if He had been overpowered. Instead, He went forth willingly, totally in charge of the situation.

He asked them, "Whom are you seeking?" When they replied, "Jesus of Nazareth," He told them, "I am He." John adds, "And Judas, who betrayed Him, also stood with them." How sad! In the first Psalm, we read as follows: "Blessed [is] the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful" [Psalm 1 verse 1]. Judas, the former disciple, now stands with these enemies of Christ. What a dreadful position he had now got himself into!

An amazing thing then followed. "Now when He said to them, "I am [He]," they drew back and fell to the ground." At this moment, the supreme power of the Lord Jesus shone out. This shows us clearly that no-one could have any power over Him, unless He allowed it. Rather than moving forward to arrest Him, the great group of soldiers and others went back and fell down before Him. It shows that the sheer number of soldiers who had come out was totally unnecessary. No matter how many there were, they could not have done anything unless He allowed it. The 16th century reformer John Calvin had some interesting things to say about this verse, which I will quote here:

"He replies mildly that he is the person whom they seek, and yet, as if they had been struck down by a violent tempest, or rather by a thunderbolt, he lays them prostrate on the ground. There was no want of power in him, therefore, to restrain their hands, if he had thought proper; but he wished to obey his Father, by whose decree he knew that he was called to die.

We may infer from this how dreadful and alarming to the wicked the voice of Christ will be, when he shall ascend his throne to judge the world. At that time he stood as a lamb ready to be sacrificed; his majesty, so far as outward appearance was concerned, was utterly gone; and yet when he utters but a single word, his armed and courageous enemies fall down. And what was the word? He thunders no fearful excommunication against them, but only replies, It is I."

Calvin goes on to say,

"Besides, as this was in some measure accidental to the voice of Christ, to whom it peculiarly belongs to raise up men who were lying in a state of death, he will undoubtedly display toward us such power as to raise us even to heaven." [Ref. 1]

Some great words from Calvin there.

As Psalm 29 verse 4 tells us, "The voice of the LORD [is] powerful; The voice of the LORD [is] full of majesty." Here we can see the effect of that voice. Judas must have fallen down with the soldiers too. What a terrible thing for him, to feel the power of the One who had been his friend. Judas had now taken the position of being His enemy. As we read the story, we could wish that, even at this late stage, Judas would have changed his mind and repented. Tragically, he did not. But if we believe and trust in the Lord Jesus as our Saviour, we will rejoice to hear His voice, because it will

be powerful to save us. As Calvin puts it so well, "he will undoubtedly display toward us such power as to raise us even to heaven." His voice will not be a terror but rather a joy to us.

After this display of the Lord Jesus' power, the soldiers must have been somewhat embarrassed when Jesus asked them for the second time, "Whom are you seeking?" I wonder if any of them began to have some misgivings at this stage? However, this second time the Lord Jesus did not display His power in the same way, but instead He acted to deliver His eleven disciples. "Jesus answered, "I have told you that I am [He]. Therefore, if you seek Me, let these go their way," that the saying might be fulfilled which He spoke, "Of those whom You gave Me I have lost none."

Earlier on I quoted from John chapter 10 verse 15, where the Lord Jesus said, "I lay down My life for the sheep." Here we see the Lord Jesus doing just that. He willingly gave Himself up to His captors, but at the same time He provided a way of escape for His eleven disciples. Given that He had caused the whole group of soldiers to go backwards and fall down at His word just before, and knowing what His word could accomplish, for example the raising of Lazarus back from the dead, we can be sure that this simple saying, "let these go their way," was completely sufficient to guarantee the safety of the disciples on that day. A German preacher of the 19th century, F. W. Krummacher, said very nicely, "It was not a request, but a royal command." [Ref. 2] It sheds a light on a verse in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 10 and verse 13, where we read, "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God [is] faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear [it]." Here Jesus provided a way of escape for His disciples, and He continues to provide a way of escape for us too, so that we will be able to bear trials and temptations that come upon us. This is very encouraging, because it is easy to feel alone and abandoned by God when in difficult circumstances. In reality, He is watching over us, and His word and His promises are all-powerful.

Furthermore, it is very interesting to see in this incident a picture of how God is mindful of His own words, and how He acts in accordance with them. John tells us that Jesus said, "let these go their way, so that His earlier words might be fulfilled, "Of those whom You gave Me I have lost none." Those particular words were recorded in John chapter 17, verse 12, as He prayed to His Father. Now the Lord Jesus is mindful of His words and He acts to ensure their fulfilment. Now we know that nothing that He says will ever fall to the ground. This incident is a good illustration of Jeremiah chapter 1 verse 12, which I will read from the English Standard Version: "Then the LORD said to me, "You have seen well, for I am watching over my word to perform it."" Here indeed was an example of the Lord watching over His word to perform it. This is a great encouragement for us!

It is worth stopping a moment to consider how the Lord Jesus would have felt about His betrayal. We are not told specifically in the passage that we read today, but we can get a clue from Psalm 41 verse 9, "Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up [his] heel against me." These very words were quoted by the Lord Jesus at the last supper, as we read in John chapter 13 verse 18, when He identified His betrayer. They show how hurtful the betrayal was. Jesus' friendship and love towards Judas was totally genuine, even though He knew what would happen in the end. Right at the end, when Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss (this particular incident is not recorded in John's Gospel), Jesus responded, "Friend, why have you come?" (Matthew chapter 26 verse 50). There were plenty of sincere opportunities for Judas to repent.

There have no doubt been plenty more such characters in this world's history. William Tyndale, who translated the Bible into the English language, was betrayed by Henry Phillips. It is disturbing to recognise that this is, indeed, something that we are capable of, as humans. What a relief, then, to turn to the Lord Jesus, who cares for His own, protects His own, and will never, ever betray us or abandon us. The passage we have considered today may have been a sad one, but we have seen the willingness with which Jesus freely gave Himself up for us, and we have also seen His great power in sending His enemies down prostrate before Him when He showed His Deity, "I

Am." We saw too how He is watchful over His word to perform it, and how He guarantees the safety of His own. So even in a sad passage, we can derive comfort and encouragement as we consider some of the attributes of our Saviour. He is worthy of our praise and thanks today!

The Apostle Paul said, as recorded for us in Acts chapter 20 verse 35, "And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."" In our passage for today, we have seen how the Lord Jesus gave Himself for our sakes. To quote the Apostle Paul again, "the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." (Galatians chapter 2 verse 20). Throughout the Bible, we see God giving. It is a good thought, then, to think how supremely blessed, that is to say happy, He must be, since it is more blessed to give than to receive. From our point of view, we are the blessed recipients of His grace.

Thank you for listening to the Truth for Today Easter Message on Betrayed - Judas, John chapter 18 verses 1-9, talk number T1139.

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Ref. 1. "Calvin's Commentary on the Bible". <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/cal/john-18.html>. 1840-57. These files are public domain.

Ref. 2. The suffering Savior: or, Meditations on the last days of Christ by F.W. Krummacher. Public domain, <https://archive.org/details/sufferingsavioro00krum/page/132>

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