



"The Price of Treason"

Matthew 26:14-16,20-25,47-50; 27:1-5

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Matthew 26:14-16 *Judas Agrees to Betray Jesus*

¹⁴ Then one of the Twelve—the one called Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priests ¹⁵ and asked, “What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?” So they counted out for him thirty silver coins. ¹⁶ From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

Matthew 26:20-25

²⁰ When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve. ²¹ And while they were eating, he said, “I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me.”

²² They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, “Surely not I, Lord?”

²³ Jesus replied, “The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. ²⁴ The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.”

²⁵ Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, “Surely not I, Rabbi?”

Jesus answered, “Yes, it is you.”^[a]

Footnotes:

- a. Matthew 26:25 Or “You yourself have said it”

Matthew 26:47-50 *Jesus Arrested*

⁴⁷ While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people. ⁴⁸ Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: “The one I kiss is the man; arrest him.” ⁴⁹ Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, “Greetings, Rabbi!” and kissed him.

⁵⁰ Jesus replied, “Friend, do what you came for.”^[a]

Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him.

Footnotes:

- a. Matthew 26:50 Or “Friend, why have you come?”

Matthew 27:1-5 *Judas Hangs Himself*

¹ Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people came to the decision to put Jesus to death.

² They bound him, led him away and handed him over to Pilate, the governor.

³ When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders. ⁴ “I have sinned,” he said, “for I have betrayed innocent blood.”

“What is that to us?” they replied. “That’s your responsibility.”

⁵ So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself.

Introduction.

The cover article of an issue of *Time* magazine several years ago was the story of Alrich Ames, the CIA agent who decided to tell the Soviets everything he knew. As a result of his betrayal, people were executed, key operations were blown, and Ames made about \$2 million over a 9 year period. He is arguably one of the greatest traitors in American history and ranks



right up there with Benedict Arnold. In an interview Ames said he had identified 25 CIA agents to the KGB, and he bragged about how he derailed dozens of sensitive, multi-million dollar covert operations. But it was his own rationalizations that provided the most chilling insight into affairs of the state and affairs of the heart. It was the price of treason.

Tonight we remember another incident of treason, when Judas betrayed Jesus. He didn't receive \$2 million dollars for his betrayal - only 30 pieces of silver, and only one man died as a result of his treachery - our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. But it could be argued that Judas' betrayal was the greatest act of treason in human history. Never did a person deserve it less, and never did it cost a person more.

This night, as we approach the Lord's Table and as we remember our Lord's death, let us take a moment to consider Judas' betrayal, and Judas' remorse.

I. Judas' Betrayal.

On the night of the Last Supper as Jesus and His disciples celebrated the Passover feast, the Lord startled the Twelve by saying, *"One of you will betray me."* According to Matthew Judas had already received the 30 pieces of silver from the chief priests as a reward for his promised deed, and yet he had the audacity to say, *"Surely not I, Rabbi?" (26:25).* Later he served as a guide for a detachment of soldiers of the temple police that arrested Jesus, and this traitor pointed Christ out by means of a kiss.

What caused Judas to betray Jesus? Many have speculated that it was injured pride, or perhaps disappointed ambition, or maybe deeply entrenched greed, or even fear of being put out of the synagogue. No doubt all of these things were involved to some degree, but I think the most basic reason is probably because Judas could not reconcile his selfish heart with the unselfish and sacrificial love of Christ.

Scripture suggests that Judas was a selfish person who was unable or unwilling to understand the unselfish and extravagant deed of Mary of Bethany. You'll recall she anointed Jesus with costly perfume, and in his criticism of the act, Judas could not comprehend the extravagance and impracticality of her loving devotion. We're also told that Judas was given the job of being the treasurer for the disciples' common purse, and he stole from it regularly. The chasm between Judas' selfishness and Jesus' magnanimous love was so great that either Judas had to give himself wholly and completely to Christ, or he had to offer his help to get rid of Him. Tragically, he chose the latter course of action.

When did the change begin in the heart of Judas? We get a hint at this in the gospel of John. About a year before the end, when Christ resisted the attempt of His followers to make Him king, and when many of His disciples decided to turn back and no longer followed Him, Jesus warned Judas against the evil spirit which he was allowing to take possession of his mind and heart. Our Lord said, *"Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!" (Jn. 6:30).*

But Judas did not heed the warning, and perhaps it was at this point that he began to steal from the purse he carried for the group. Maybe he felt that he should have some tangible reward for following Christ, and he justified his actions by saying to himself that what he was taking was infinitely less than he had been led to expect. As he practiced this secret sin, his character could not help but deteriorate, and eventually he succumbed to the temptation to



betray our Lord. Be careful when you give into small temptations. C.S. Lewis said, "The surest road to hell is the slow and gradual one."

The most disturbing aspect of Judas' betrayal was the sign by which he had agreed to make Jesus known to His enemies. As long as there is true love in the world, this act will trouble everyone who has ever given or received this token of affection. It was with a kiss that Judas signaled to the soldiers who they were to arrest. That night and on into the next day, Jesus' face was marred in many ways. It was covered with bloody sweat, it was bruised with blows to his head, the soldiers spat upon it, and it was pierced with a crown of thorns. But nothing went so close to the heart of Jesus as the betrayal of this kiss.

II. Judas' Remorse.

After Jesus was condemned, Judas' conscience began to bother him. The money on which he had set his heart now troubled him greatly. Every coin seemed to be an eye through which eternal justice was gazing at his crime. So he returned to the temple where he had been employed by the chief priests, and he cried out, "*I have sinned, for I have betrayed innocent blood*" (27:4). The chief priests replied, "*What is that to us? That is your responsibility*" (27:5). They had been friendly enough to Judas when he had come to them before, but now, after Judas had served their ends, they dismissed him with contempt. But Judas could not keep the money any longer, and he threw the coins in the temple and left.

But where was he going? I wish it had been his desire to run to Christ, that breaking through all the obstacles and rules he had rushed to Jesus and thrown himself at the Savior's feet. So what if the soldiers killed him in the effort. He would have been a martyr of repentance, and that very day he would have been with Christ in Paradise. Judas confessed his sin, and he threw away the reward of his iniquity, but his remorse lacked the one key ingredient which is most essential - he did not turn from his sin to God. True repentance is more than the remorse of a guilty conscience; it is also the call of God and a return to the Lord. Judas' remorse lacked all this.

So he went out and hanged himself. Suicide is a tragic way of escape. It tries to evade the burdens and responsibilities of life, and it forces others to bear those burdens instead. It denies the power of God, for it gives up all hope. Suicide by hanging was not common among the Jewish people, and in the entire OT there is only one single case of it, and strangely enough, it was done by a man who was the prototype of Judas. Ahithophel, who was a counselor and friend of king David, betrayed his master as Judas betrayed Christ, and he came to the same tragic end.

The money for which Judas sold Jesus was eventually used to purchase a graveyard to bury strangers. The chief priests picked up the coins from the floor, but they did not consider them worthy to be put back into the temple treasury. So they decided to use the money to purchase the field where Judas hanged himself, and the public, on hearing of the incident, named the place "The Field of Blood." The cemetery became a kind of monument to the traitor, and Judas was the first one to be buried there.

Conclusion.

As we think about Judas this night, there are two things we should do. First, we should not try to whitewash his sin so as to blunt our reaction to it. Some people have tried to rework the



psychology of Judas' betrayal and suggest he was a victim and that he was simply trying to force Jesus' hand into action as Messiah. However, the Bible is clear that Judas' actions were the result of his allowing Satan to enter his mind and heart, as well as the avarice and greed which dominated his life.

But the second thing we should do as we think about Judas is to avoid thinking of him as a sinner was very different from you and me so that he fails to serve as an example and a warning to everyone us. Anyone who thinks they are above denying and betraying Christ should take an honest look at their own lives. That was the mistake of the disciples. They all thought they were above falling.

How often do we deny our Lord and betray His love every day? How many times have we sold Him out in the pursuit of what we want? How have we allowed the almighty dollar to dominate our lives like Judas? We should be as John Newton, the great pastor and hymn writer in England in the 1700s who was also a former slave trader. Once when he saw a man being led away to the gallows to be hanged, turned to his friend and said, "There but for the grace of God go I."

Let us not be as Judas, who, when he realized the depth of his sin, failed to turn to Christ where he could have found grace and forgiveness if only he had asked. Instead he decided to bear his own sin himself and went to his own destruction. Let us instead come to the Table of our Lord, let us confess our sin, and let us with gratitude accept the free gift of God's grace in the broken body and shed blood of Christ.

This was the price of treason which Jesus paid for you and me. Amen.

