

THE HOUR OF BETRAYAL

Matt. 26:45, 46 - *"Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me."*

All of us surely remember one incident that took place while Jesus ate the Passover with His disciples. As they were eating, Jesus said, "One of you shall betray me." One by one the disciples asked, "Lord, is it I?"

Judas knew that he would betray Jesus, and he was determined to go through with it. All arrangements had been made. We read in verse 15 of this chapter, "And Judas said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver."

Judas tried to cover up his intended sin and pretended to be as horror-stricken as the other disciples when Jesus announced that one of them would betray Him. Since they all, in turn, asked Jesus "Lord, is it I?" Judas also had to ask Him to avoid exposure; otherwise he would almost reveal himself as the betrayer. So Judas was about to say "Lord," as the other disciples did, but the word seemed to stick in his throat and he could only ask in hypocrisy, "Master, is it I?"

Judas was a wonderful actor, doubt it not, especially in the dubious art of hypocrisy, deceit, fraud, and pretense. Every hypocrite must be a good actor, or else his hypocrisy would be exposed. Practice in this type of acting makes for perfection, and Judas had a great deal of experience. He began by stealing money from the common treasury of the disciples. Let this not surprise you. He was a trusted man, and they elected him the caretaker of their common funds. There is no reason to believe that Judas was always a cheat. At first, perhaps, he yielded to the temptation to take small sums. "Who will ever know the difference?" the devil might have whispered into his ear. Soon larger and larger amounts were transferred to his own pocket, and he had to give more and more false, yet plausible reasons for the disappearance of the funds to the other disciples. "Oh, I had to spend so and so much money for food, and I had to help out this beggar, and that poor person, etc. I hope you do not mind," we can hear Judas explaining.

Judas finally became so bold in his hypocrisy that when Mary of Bethany anointed Jesus with costly ointment, Judas cried out in indignation "Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?" (John 12:5). St. John gives this explanation of Judas' words, "This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein."

The stage is set. This is the disciple and fine actor who is now drawing near to Jesus in Gethsemane, leading a band of soldiers and elders of the Jews. The sands of time are running out, the hour of prayer in Gethsemane is past, and the hour of betrayal is fast approaching. Jesus knew all this, and it is He who announced the hour of the betrayal. Let us therefore consider the hour of betrayal.

I. The Method of the Betrayal

How would you expect Judas to go about betraying his Master? Surely Judas, superb actor that he was, superb in the role of deceiver and cheater which he had so long practiced, would use a tool befitting his peculiar talents — a kiss.

The kiss has always been a sign of love and affection. Joseph kissed his brethren as a sign that he still loved them. Women kissed Jesus' feet to show their sincere love for Him. In the Apostles' day, Christians

often greeted one another with a holy kiss. A kiss is simply a sign of affection and true love.

We can understand why Judas used a kiss to betray Jesus. A kiss means one thing to most people, So Judas made a new and unsuspected use of it. This is the mark of a true hypocrite who twists and perverts innocent things into an evil purpose. Ah! Judas was clever. He had thought this thing out. If he used a harmless kiss, none of the disciples would ever suspect the true meaning behind it. Then, too, a kiss would be an unmistakable sign for the enemies of Jesus. “Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he: hold him fast” said Judas. The thoughts of his mind might have been something like this: “Even if I do betray Jesus, the enemies cannot harm Him; look at the miracles He did; He is very powerful. And I will be richer by thirty pieces of silver — quite a sum of money, eh? A fool-proof scheme! And I can still be treasurer of the disciples and continue to help myself. But I must do some good acting and spread love to Jesus all over my face when I kiss Him.” Perhaps Judas even arranged that the enemies should not step forward until he kissed the Lord; perhaps it was arranged that they should approach from a different direction, so that the appearance of Judas and the enemies at about the same time would look like a coincidence.

Judas, your little hour has arrived when you will, for a moment or so, occupy the center of the stage which you have so carefully set. Judas, you will become a very well-known man throughout the ages. For all time to come men will think of you when they say, “The same night in which He was betrayed.”

How revolting and shocking it is to see Judas standing there, playing both sides, one against the other! “Look, Lord, how much I love Thee! Look, enemies, how faithfully I have kept my part of the bargain!”

Any other means of betrayal would have been better than a kiss. It would have been far more honorable for Judas to have pointed out Jesus and called Him by name. But this corrupt disciple had to use the kiss as a means of betrayal. Things are always much worse when a person toys with holy things. The act of Judas is like killing a member of the church by putting poison in the Communion cup. Belshazzar desecrated the vessels of the holy Temple; Eli’s sons cheated the people in the house of God; the Jews often brought lame and crippled animals for sacrifice, thereby cheating God; Ananias and Sapphira tried to deceive the early Church. Sins seem much more horrible and revolting when committed with holy things, as in Gethsemane. Judas betrayed Jesus, the holy Son of God, with a kiss.

Judas had been a disciple of Jesus for about three years. But all that he got out of the teaching and schooling of Jesus was about the price of a slave, thirty pieces of silver, plus what other money he was able to steal. “What will ye give me?” became the ruling passion of his life. Are we not deeply grieved at the actions and attitude of Judas?

Beloved, we have somewhat similar feelings for those who constantly make the claim of extreme poverty when it comes to doing the Lord’s work. These people would like us to believe that their poverty is so extreme that they just cannot give any gifts at all to the Church, but their own automobiles must have all the latest gadgets costing hundreds of extra dollars; their television sets must be the latest and the best. Some members of our churches see no inconsistency in this that their entire salary goes for food, car, luxuries, insurance, etc., with nothing left at all for the Lord’s kingdom. “We just cannot afford to give,” is the constant wail. Certainly, if everything else comes first, there will be nothing left for the Lord — but then, if you are such people, do not act so grieved at Judas for selling out his Lord. Remember, faith without works is dead! In many instances the Word is truly like the seed that fell on the path. Some people’s hearts are almost as hard as Judas’. No scheme is too low to try. No excuse is too poor to offer. No warnings, no plea will help. A pastor can warn some so-called members again and again, and they will agree with him. Yet somehow one has the feeling that the admonition has little or no effect.

Remember, the apostasy of Judas was a gradual process. Little sins, little amounts, small deceptions at first. If Judas had been asked in the beginning of his downfall, “Would you betray Jesus, if we pay you

well?” he might have been shocked to think that someone could suggest such an idea. But with a little more practice in sin, the betrayal was a comparatively easy matter for him.

Beloved, we must all repent before it is too late. Repent now during this blessed season of Lent. God has blessed us in America with much wealth and goods. One of our great dangers is that we become materially-minded. Our church and each individual member must take the warning of Jesus to heart which He gave us in the parable of the sower, “He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful” (Matt. 13:22). Stop and think before it is too late. If we do not call a halt, if we do not earnestly endeavor to fight our old Adam, he may draw us down the way that Judas went.

The hour of betrayal was at hand as Judas drew near and kissed Jesus. What were the results of that betrayal? We shall turn our attention to that question now.

II. The Result of the Betrayal

Judas went out into the night after the betrayal, not only out into the physical night, but also into the night of blackness and despair. The enormity of his sins began to dawn upon his benighted soul and to prey upon his conscience, for man’s conscience cannot be denied and ignored entirely. When Judas saw that Jesus was condemned, that things were not going as he thought they would, he brought back the money to the chief priests and elders. The perfect crime had failed; the foolproof scheme was worthless. Judas began to see the chain of events which his act had set in motion. The money which had meant so much to him was now burning his palm so painfully that he threw it down in the temple. As he had betrayed, so now he was betrayed. “What is that to us?” he heard the priests say in a scornful voice. They meant, “Why come to us and bother us with your guilty conscience?” As Judas lived, so he died, in a manner befitting his cowardice and hypocrisy. We can almost hear him murmuring, “I cannot stand this life. I have made a mess of it all. It is too hopeless to continue. My sin is too great. I cannot be forgiven. I will take the quickest and easiest way out — suicide.”

Judas did commit suicide in despair and anguish. He left this world empty-handed and alone, friendless and despised. This was the direct result of betraying his Lord. But that is not all. Of very few people does the Bible say that they went to hell. It does say that of Judas. In Acts 1:25, we are told that Judas went “to his own place.” How it makes us shudder when we contemplate the eternal fate of Judas. Think of the far-reaching results of sin. Judas coveted money, and he ended in hell. We recall Jesus’ words, “It had been good for that man if he had not been born” (Matt. 26:24).

The chief priests and elders were just as bad as Judas, because they were fellow conspirators with Judas. If their cause had been just, they would not have had to enter into such a scheme with Judas. Their work had to be done under cover of night, as Jesus told them: “This is your hour and the power of darkness.” They had no pity whatsoever and became tools of the devil by driving Judas to despair and suicide. Judas’ words, “I have betrayed innocent blood,” had no effect on his tormenters.

The betrayal not only had far-reaching results for Judas, but also for Jesus. The betrayal set in motion a chain of events that nothing could stop. True, it was the will of God that Jesus should suffer and pay for the sins of the world, but He did not go with a lighter heart, knowing that it was one of His own trusted disciples who had set off the chain reaction.

As things got progressively worse for Judas after the betrayal, so it was with Jesus also. Before Caiaphas He was accused of blasphemy, because He claimed to be what He was, the eternal Son of God. Before Pilate He was mocked, ridiculed, rejected, falsely accused and condemned. Pilate had Him scourged; the soldiers crowned Him with thorns. He was forced to bear His cross for a time, and then was nailed upon it between two thieves.

But the worst sufferings of Jesus were yet to come. When man was through tormenting Jesus, then God stepped in and let Him sink into the black abyss of hell. That happened when Jesus cried out, “Why hast thou forsaken me?” The result of the betrayal for Judas was this: he finally suffered the tortures of the damned for his unbelief and crime. The result of the betrayal for Jesus was this: He finally suffered the tortures of the damned for us. Jesus then died with the words on His parched lips, “Father into thy hands I commend my spirit.”

Why was everyone against the Lord Jesus? Because the Father had decreed it so. “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). God loved His only-begotten Son, and yet He gave Him in the creatures’ stead to suffer as their Substitute and to be punished in their place. How can anyone understand such love?

The hour of betrayal has, indeed, its sad side, but it also has its happy side. God foresaw the betrayal and sufferings of His Son and moved it all into His plan of salvation. Although it was terrible crimes which led Jesus to the cross, yet by that very cross God redeemed and saved all sinners. “God is love.” He loves you and me with a love beyond words, and He proved His love by offering His own Son in our stead. Now we are saved by grace through faith in the cross of Jesus.

Jesus is love. In all the sufferings of our Lord and in all His words we see His love for us. His first words from the cross showed His love for His enemies. While they were nailing His hands and feet, He asked His Father to show them mercy. While Jesus was on the cross, He showed His love for His mother, love for the thief, love for His Father.

Jesus showed His love to Judas also. Remember, the all-seeing eye of Jesus knew everything that Judas had done; Jesus saw the hypocrisy in the man’s heart. Yet Jesus said, “Friend, wherefore art thou come?” (Matt. 26:50.) Jesus was not acting or pretending, as Judas did, when He tenderly called him a “friend.” In that word to Judas there was still the plea to repent and to come to Him for salvation.

There was no word of condemnation, no word of disgust, no word of contempt for Judas, because Jesus still loved him.

Since Jesus felt that way about Judas, there is hope for you and me, dear friends. No matter what deceit and hypocrisy we are now practicing or have practiced in the past — there is still hope because your Friend has paid for you and me.

In this hour of betrayal, dear Lord, look upon us as Thy dear friends also. Grant that we may always trust in Thy holy cross for salvation, and help us with Thy Holy Spirit, especially in this blessed Lenten season, to walk closer with Thee in love and good works. Hear us, Lord Jesus, for the sake of Thy hours of suffering. Amen.

The Prayer

O heavenly Father, again we thank Thee for sending Thy dear Son into this world to be betrayed into the hands of sinners in our stead. Withdraw not Thy grace and compassion from us. Otherwise we shall surely fall and be led into temptations.

O blessed Savior, we ask of Thee the same measure of mercy and love and patience that Thou didst bestow upon Judas in the hour of betrayal. We are not worthy of any mercy or grace, and we know that we deserve to be cast away forever. But for the sake of Thy deep humiliation and bitter sufferings and death, dear Lord Jesus, have pity upon us poor, miserable sinners.

O Holy Spirit, let us not gradually slip into sins that will destroy our souls, as was the case with the unhappy disciple. Let us not practice hypocrisy and deceit. With Thy truth uproot the thorns and weeds that spring up in our hearts, so that we might see Thee, the Father, Son, and Spirit, face to face on that Great Day, and live with Thee in eternal glory. Amen.