

Let Another Take His Office
Luke 21:37-22:6, 47-48, Acts 1:15-20
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Read Luke 21:37-22:6, 47-48, Acts 1:15-20

"The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times." (Psalm 12:6)

Introduction

One of the early heroes of the Revolutionary War for the colonies was a young general who had been a sea trader before the war began. He was known as one of the most courageous and enterprising young leaders, having captured Fort Ticonderoga with his Connecticut militia. He also cobbled together a small fleet of ships to take on 25 British vessels at the Battle of Lake Champlain, and though he lost that battle, many historians say that he saved the war at that point because the British had to change plans. But as the war progressed, the general became disillusioned with the revolutionary cause. Combining that with jealousy that five officers had been promoted over him and a desire to pay off large personal debts, he secretly began contacting British General Henry Clinton about switching sides if they'd pay him. His efforts to help the British take the fort at West Point were foiled, but he escaped before being captured by the Americans, and became a full-time British general, fighting against the troops he used to command. General Washington tried to have him captured by spies so that he could make a public example of him, but he was not successful. After America won the war, the general settled with his wife in London, because he was known as the ultimate villain in the colonies; but even in England, he was not loved, he was greeted with hisses when he attended the theater. He died at the age of 60, and his name has forever been attached to the idea of betrayal. His name, as you have no doubt guessed, was Benedict Arnold.¹

In our Scripture passage this morning, we meet another man whose name is synonymous with betrayal. To call someone a Judas is to call attention to the fact that they have switched loyalties, ratted you out, or stabbed you in the back. Luke does not have very much information about Judas in his Gospel, so we will also be looking at his second book, Acts, to see how this disciple's story ended. We'll see a man who was in the right place at the right time with the wrong motives to be used and manipulated by evil forces intent on crushing the man that Judas had spent three years following. Our first passage shows us

I. The Opportunity for Betrayal (21:37-22:6)

³⁷ And every day he was teaching in the temple, but at night he went out and lodged on the mount called Olivet. ³⁸ And early in the morning all the people came to him in the temple to hear him. ¹ Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called the Passover. ² And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to put him to death, for they feared the people. ³ Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve. ⁴ He went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray him to them. ⁵ And they were glad, and agreed to give him money. ⁶ So he consented and sought an opportunity to betray him to them in the absence of a crowd.

Jerusalem was overcrowded with Jewish pilgrims who had come from all over the land to celebrate the week-long Feast of Unleavened Bread. Verse 37 tells us that Jesus was teaching in the temple

¹ <https://www.history.com/news/9-things-you-may-not-know-about-benedict-arnold>

during the day, then camping out in the Mount of Olives at night. The Jewish religious leaders were most likely very busy with temple duties and various activities related to the feast and the Passover, but it's clear that they had one high priority that week: they had reached the end of their patience with Jesus and needed Him silenced once and for all. He was teaching in the temple after kicking out the moneychangers and sellers. He was right in the heart of the city, they couldn't avoid if they'd wanted to; it's easy to understand how He was the focus of their anger. Luke has been telling us since chapter 6 that the Pharisees and scribes were trying to catch Jesus saying something that would get Him in trouble. But they hadn't been able to figure out how to get Him arrested so far, and now with the crowds who loved Him and gathered every time He taught, they were afraid to lay hands on Him in public. They needed to do their dirty deeds in secret. This should probably shock us a little more; if you've been in church for a while, you just think, "Oh yeah, the leaders wanted to kill Jesus. No big deal." This would be like finding out that Rick Warren and T.D. Jakes were plotting to kill someone. That would be alarming, to say the least.

Luckily for the leaders, someone else wanted Jesus arrested and sentenced to death. Though these were supposedly "men of God," their desires were answered by Satan, who it says, "*entered into Judas.*" Judas, one of Jesus' 12 apostles, now empowered and influenced, maybe possessed by Satan, sought out the chief priests to offer his services. He would tip them off to Jesus' whereabouts in exchange for money. We know from Matthew 26 that Judas would receive thirty pieces of silver for betraying Jesus, which is equivalent to several thousand dollars today. In Exodus 21, thirty pieces of silver was the price of a slave. We know from John 12 that Judas was the treasurer for the apostles, but that he was also a thief and often stole from the collective moneybag. Surely, Satan used what was already a heart more in love with money than with God and righteousness to accomplish his ends.

Genesis 3:15 sets up the cosmic conflict that would be continued throughout the rest of human history; it was God's curse on the serpent, Satan, after the fall of Adam and Eve: "*I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.*" The Old Testament is full of God's enemies, the offspring of Satan, attacking God's people, and God's people overcoming and surviving. It's a conflict that we see in the Egyptian enslavement and the Exodus, and into the Promised Land, to the time of judges and kings; it's the context for the warfare and fighting in the historical books. Into the New Testament, when the Savior was born to a woman, Satan tried to have Him killed; and when that failed, he tempted Jesus directly in the wilderness. His entering into Judas was the culmination of this bruising the heel of the offspring of the woman.

It's good to remember that even Jesus included someone in His inner circle who turned out to be His enemy. Jesus knew that would happen all along, but He still included Judas. We read in Luke 6 that He spent a whole night praying to the Father before He appointed the twelve apostles. "Judas was named a disciple by the definite will of God and the deliberate choice of Jesus Christ."² Then think about what Judas had been part of: he had witnessed Jesus casting out demons, healing lepers and cripples, calming storms, raising the dead; he heard all the teaching that the crowds heard, plus the private conversations that Jesus had with just the disciples. He participated in preaching the gospel, healing, and casting out demons. And he still turned away! And nobody knew it was happening except Jesus; Judas didn't make any of the other disciples suspicious. When Jesus told the apostles that one of them would betray Him (Matthew 26:21), none of them said, "Oh, is it Judas? I knew it!" No, they all said, "*Is it I, Lord?*" Apparently, they all knew that they were

² Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke, Vol. 2* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009), p. 511.

inwardly capable of betraying Him. And every one of them except Peter and John deserted Jesus when He was taken to trial.

Judas' story is a good reminder that not everyone who sits in leadership in churches is a believer. Not everyone who goes on a mission trip, who participates in ministry events or leads Bible Studies is a true follower of Christ. Sometimes spiritual activity is deceiving as to the true condition of the heart. There will be some who turn away from the faith, betraying Jesus, and it may not be the ones you thought it would be. I have been so discouraged hearing about kids who were part of my youth group that went on all the retreats and mission trips who have turned away from the Lord. God's not through with them, I pray for them. And I remember that Jesus dealt with it first.

We skip to much later in the chapter where Judas followed through on his part of the plan:

II. The Kiss of Betrayal (22:47-48)

⁴⁷ While he was still speaking, there came a crowd, and the man called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He drew near to Jesus to kiss him, ⁴⁸ but Jesus said to him, "Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?"

A kiss is almost always a good thing. It communicates affection, commitment, friendship, or respect. Parents kiss their children, romantic couples kiss one another, friends greet each other with kisses on the cheek. Kisses that are welcomed and reciprocated can be beautiful. When they are unwanted, as with a sexual assault or harassment, they are ugly. Judas' kiss was none of those; it was a signal to the Roman guards which man was to be arrested, in case there was any confusion in the darkness. Matthew 26:48 has Judas saying, "*The one I will kiss is the man; seize him.*" A gesture that was meant to communicate affection and intimacy instead communicated rejection and opposition. It would have been more appropriate for Judas to walk up to Jesus and slap him across the face! Jesus was so calm, His rebuke was a question not a harsh statement – "Would you betray me with a kiss?" He knew this was part of the events that had to happen, this was no surprise. Psalm 41:9 was fulfilled here – "*Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me.*"

Michael Card has a song called "Why?" that has these lines in it: "*Why did it have to be a friend who chose to betray the Lord? Why did he use a kiss to show them? That's not what a kiss is for. Only a friend can betray a friend, a stranger has nothing to gain. And only a friend comes close enough to ever cause so much pain.*" Knowing Judas' story can also take the sting out of when you have been betrayed and hurt by other people. Maybe you had a spouse who decided they didn't want to be married to you anymore, and so they turned to another person. Maybe you had a parent or a relative who took advantage of you physically at a young age. Maybe you had a boss or a co-worker who threw you under the bus and got you fired or made your life miserable until you quit. Maybe you had a close friend who hurt you with gossip or some other form of betrayal. Jesus knows your pain, He's been there. He knows the deep wounds that someone who was close to you can leave, and He'll help you find the ability to forgive and heal.

As I said, Luke did not record Judas' fate in his gospel. We turn to Luke's other NT book, Acts, to find out what happened to the traitor.

III. The Guilt of Betrayal (Acts 1:15-20)

¹⁵ In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (the company of persons was in all about 120) and said, ¹⁶ "Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. ¹⁷ For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry." ¹⁸ (Now this man acquired a field

with the reward of his wickedness, and falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. ¹⁹ *And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their own language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)* ²⁰ *“For it is written in the Book of Psalms, “May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it”; and ‘Let another take his office.”*”

Notice three things here:

- 1) At that point in time, a few weeks after Jesus’ death and resurrection, the apostles were fully aware of Judas’ betrayal of Jesus and his subsequent suicide,
- 2) Judas’ actions were prophesied a thousand years beforehand by David in Psalms 69 and 109, and
- 3) the apostles knew he must be replaced – they cast lots and chose a godly man named Matthias.

Judas felt so guilty about his wickedness, that he was used as “a guide to those who arrested Jesus” that, according to Matthew 27, he hanged himself. Here in Acts, it just says that he fell headlong – some people call that a contradiction. But putting the two accounts together, we see that Judas hanged himself and his body decomposed so long that when it eventually fell to the ground, his body split open. I guess we need to give Judas some credit that he felt terrible about what he had done. He was not void of remorse and so far gone to the darkness that Jesus’ death had no effect on him. He was crushed, he was so overwhelmed with guilt over his actions that he took his own life.

Suicide is never the answer, let me be very clear about that. I don’t agree with a lot of the history of church teaching that says that suicide is an unforgiveable sin. A lot of their reasoning is that there’s no way to repent of that sin after it’s happened, because you’re dead and it’s too late. But I would argue that our forgiveness is not dependent on confessing every sin afterwards. Of course, confession is a great thing, but all of our sins – past, present, and future – are forgiven when we come to faith in Jesus, and I don’t think suicide is any different. But it’s always a grievous way to end your life, and there is always a better answer. No matter how much guilt we carry, no matter how hopeless we think that life is, God can turn things around, He can redeem and renew you. We are going to look at a different apostle next week who also failed Jesus. His guilt and remorse didn’t drive him to suicide, but to repentance and new purpose in Jesus. Judas could have been forgiven, he could have been received back into the fold, but he let his despair overwhelm him.

Conclusion

My son has to read *The Inferno* by Dante for a college-level English class this semester. If you had to read it in high school or college, you know that Dante’s description of hell involves nine levels, with each level getting successively worse. This is not the Biblical picture of hell, though many people think it is; it’s just Dante’s imagination. Level 1 is called Limbo, where the virtuous pagans end up. Level 2 is for those controlled by their lust. We move through each level seeing the gluttons, the greedy, those whose sin is anger, heretics, the violent, those who committed fraud. What do you think the lowest level of hell, level 9, according to Dante, is for? Traitors. Traitors to their families, to the countries, to their guests, and to their Lord. Brutus and Cassius, who betrayed Julius Caesar are there, and next to them is Judas Iscariot. They are trapped in ice and being consumed by Satan himself.

What do you think – is Judas’ sin the worst there is, deserving of the lowest level and harshest punishment in hell? We see that Satan influenced Judas to betray Jesus and the religious leaders were the ones who actually arrested Jesus and made sure He was condemned to death. But wasn’t God also responsible for Judas’ betrayal, since God had planned for Jesus to go to the cross to die for our sins? Acts 4:27-28 records the disciples prayer: *“for truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along*

with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel to do whatever Your hand and Your plan had predestined to take place.” It was God’s plan and it was by God’s hand that the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus took place, and that included Judas’ betrayal. Yes, Judas was used by Satan for destructive purposes AND he was used by God for redemptive purposes, but he was still responsible for his actions.

John Piper calls the act of Satan entering into Judas to influence him to turn against Jesus the “Suicide of Satan.”³ Why? Because even as the evil one was working as hard as he could to bring destruction to Jesus, God was using every event in Jesus’ life to bring Him to the cross where He would both redeem His people and destroy His enemies. What man and Satan meant for evil, God used for good. Only the Supreme, wise ruler of the universe would have ultimate strength disguised as weakness. What looked like the greatest injustice, the greatest tragedy - God the Son being killed at the hands of His created beings – became the greatest triumph. Listen to how Colossians 2:13-15 describes it: *“And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.”*

If you remember the plot of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis, you know that the wardrobe that the Pevensie children discover transports them to a land called Narnia, where the evil White Witch has the land under her spell, making it always winter and never Christmas. She rules with fear and turns people into stone who cross her, she is clearly the Satan character. The four children, Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy, find out that they are the answers to the prophecy that was given for how Narnia will be rescued from the White Witch’s grasp and restored to a land ruled by Aslan, the great King. But before Aslan arrives to restore things, Edmund meets the White Witch and promises to help her and bring his brother and sisters to her palace. He has, in essence, betrayed them, even after he finds out the truth and the plans to defeat her. She has no use for him, and plans to kill him, but Aslan gives his life in exchange for the life of the traitor.

We are each Edmund, we are each Judas. We have betrayed our Creator by going our own way. In our natural state, we are rebels, enemies of God. R.C. Sproul said that, “Sin is cosmic treason.”⁴ And so from the beginning of our lives, we betray the Creator by rejecting Him and disobeying His law. But just as Aslan gave his life for the traitor who was doomed by his actions, so God the Son gave His life for all of us traitors. We didn’t deserve it, but He provided our salvation and forgiveness, our means of reconciling with Him on the cross. Unlike Judas, we have a way to escape our despair and not end our lives hopelessly. In Jesus’ death and resurrection, He gives us all we need to be reconciled with Him, adopted into His family, and given eternal life. Amen.

Benediction

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 - *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”*

³ <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/judas-iscariot-the-suicide-of-satan-and-the-salvation-of-the-world>

⁴ <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/cosmic-treason>