

Judas the Betrayer

One of the means by which Scripture teaches us, is through precept and example. So, within its pages, we have examples of faithful men of old – but also men of disobedience, who provide examples of unbelief (cp. Heb. 4:11). In our New Testament reading for the day (in Matthew chapter 26), we behold the pre-eminent example of disobedience, in the betrayal of Messiah by one who was in his closest circle of friends and disciples. Judas Iscariot, whilst being Christ's "own familiar friend" (Psa. 41:9), became the great betrayer, representative of the sin-power that lifted up its heel against him. In considering his role, and the relationship of Judas with Christ, we can learn to heed his example, lest we fall after the same example of disobedience, and become, like he, a "son of perdition" (Jno. 17:12).

Our reading in Matthew 26 reveals Messiah's knowledge of not only his betrayal, but who it was who should betray him: "As they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me" (Mat. 26:21). Indeed, we read elsewhere that "Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him" hence he had told his disciples: "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?" (Jno. 6:64, 70). This is a most significant point to bear in mind: throughout the 3 ½ year ministry of Messiah, and the things experienced with his disciples, Jesus knew Judas would betray him. Though he, like the other 11 disciples, was given the Holy Spirit to heal men of their infirmities, though he, like them, heard the teachings of the Lord, Judas was predominantly a man of the flesh. His true character was revealed before his betrayal, in his response to the anointing of Christ by the unnamed woman of Matthew chapter 26. As she poured out her alabaster box of "very precious ointment", "when his disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, to what purpose is this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor" (Mat. 26:8-9). Judas was leading this murmuring, for the record in John 12 cites him as saying: "Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor". His motives were not that the poor might benefit, for the record continues to say: "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" (Jno. 12:6). In this event, Judas is revealed to be carnally minded, seeking his own advantage to the expense of others.

This aspect is also revealed in the prophetic Psalms which speak of him. Psalm 109, which is cited in the New Testament as being to do with Judas (see verse 8 compared with Acts 1:20), describes his relationship with Messiah, who had little of this world's goods: "... he remembered not to show mercy, but *persecuted the poor and needy man*, that he might even slay the broken in heart" (Psa. 109:16). Self interest is the predominant characteristic of Judas - a common failing amongst men, which we must learn to guard against.

Immediately following the anointing of Jesus, as described above, we read further in Matthew 26:

"Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, and 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. And from that time, he sought opportunity to betray him" (Mat. 26:14-16).

"What will ye give me" is the constant demand of the flesh. What can we do for personal gain and reward – even at the expense of the "poor and needy man". Despising the honour showed to Messiah by the woman who anointed him ready for his burial, Judas was not satisfied with stealing from the

collection bag for the poor. He saw greater opportunity in betraying his Master, and had no faith that he would rise from the grave to become the judge of the living and the dead. “What will ye give me”: how often does this question arise in our minds, as we see opportunities for personal gain – even when it involves a departure from the Way ordained by Christ? We must seek to develop our faith, and discipline our minds to overcome such thoughts. “What can we give?” is instead the constant question within minds of faith, even as it was in the mind of Messiah, who gave all that we might have life.

1 Timothy chapter 6 exhorts us to guard against the example of Judas:

“the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Tim. 6:10).

This is the way of Balaam: the pursuit of this world’s temporal goods, to the expense of the eternal things related to the kingdom to come. Like Judas, we can so easily allow the cares of this life, and the love of mammon to obscure our view of the vision of Joy set before us. Let us beware, lest we meet his same end!

The actual sum covenanted to Judas was actually not a large amount of money at all. It was just 30 pieces of silver, the worth of a Hebrew slave:

*“If the ox shall push a manservant or a maidservant; he shall give unto their master **thirty shekels of silver**, and the ox shall be stoned”* (Ex. 21:32).

Even so, the “bulls of Bashan” pushed against Jesus (Psa. 22:12) securing his death, and rewarding the betrayer with the price of a slave.

IDENTIFYING THE BETRAYER

Returning to Matthew 26, we read of how the Master identified the One who should rise against him:

“he answered and said, He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me ... then said Judas which betrayed him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said” (Mat. 26:23-25).

Judas was not always in opposition to Christ. He was not always his enemy. So the spirit of Christ in the Psalms speaks:

*“For it was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it: neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him: **but it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance”*** (Psa. 55:12-13).

And again:

*“Yea, **mine own familiar friend**, in whom I trusted, **which did eat of my bread**, hath lifted up his heel against me”* (Psa. 41:9).

Despite knowing all that Judas was to do, Jesus continued to extend the tokens of friendship to him, even sharing a meal of fellowship together. Right until the point of his actual betrayal, Jesus treated him as a companion and friend, saying even at that point, “**Friend**, wherefore art thou come?” (Mat. 26:50). Judas the traitor, however, used the tokens of friendship deceitfully. As Jesus said to him: “Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with **a kiss?**” (Lu. 22:48). So, as it is written in the proverbs: “faithful are the wounds of a friend [i.e. Christ]; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful [i.e. Judas]” (Prov. 27:6).

It would appear that Judas did have a conscience, even though for a while it was numb to the things which he did. Matthew chapter 27 records his regret for what he had done in securing Messiah’s death:

“Then Judas which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? See thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself” (Mat. 27:3-5).

There is a sin unto death, which shall not be forgiven. Christ himself spoke of what would happen to the betrayer:

“the Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! ***It had been good for that man if he had not been born***” (Mat. 26:24).

Psalms 109 also speaks of Judas’ demise:

“as he loved cursing, so let it come unto him: as he delighted not in blessing, so let it be far from him. As he clothed himself with cursing as with his garment, so let it come into his bowels as water, and like oil into his bones. Let it be unto him as the garment which covereth him, and for a girdle wherewith he is girded continually” (Psa. 109:17-19).

And so the record in Acts shows the fulfilment of these words:

“Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out” (Acts 1:18).

Putting these testimonies together, it would appear that Judas sought relief through suicide, hanging himself by his girdle. However, the girdle broke, and he fell headlong and his bowels gushed out. Some would see a contradiction between the record of Acts 1, and Matthew 27, but there is none. We already saw that Judas stole from the collection bag for the poor: it would appear to be that he used this money to purchase the field (i.e. the reward of iniquity), where he fell and died. This is different to the money thrown back down at the feet of the Chief Priests and Elders, which they used to purchase the Potter’s field.

So it is that when we come to consider the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, we see a contrast with the death of Judas. Jesus died to save men from their sins: Judas died as a consequence of sin. There is another ironic point to notice: “Judas” is the Greek form of “Judah”, which is also abbreviated as “Jew”. We read of a true “Jew” in Romans chapter 2:

“he is not a Jew which is one outwardly: neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God” (Romans 2:28-29).

Judas, by name, was a “Jew”. But though he had a name that lived, he was dead. Inwardly, he did not have the right spirit: he remained a man of the flesh. How ironic then, that his inward parts gushed out at his death, declaring his condemnation before all!

Returning to Matthew chapter 26, we saw how Messiah revealed to his disciples that one of them would betray him. Their response to this is most instructive:

“and they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I?” (Mat. 26:22).

The way of the carnal mind is to point the finger at others. “Is it *him?*” is the thinking of the flesh – those who follow the spirit however look inwardly first “Is it *I?*”. The Apostle alludes to this in speaking of what we do together, when we come to partake of the memorial feast – like the disciples in the upper room:

“whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord [cp. Judas!!]. ***But let a man examine himself,*** and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body” (1 Cor. 11:27-29).

When we come together to take the bread and the wine in memory of Messiah’s sacrifice for our sins, let us consider ourselves, and our own conduct. Let us consider the treachery of Judas, as an example of unbelief and disobedience, lest we be beguiled by the way of the flesh to follow in his steps, and so reap the consequences of crucifying Messiah afresh.

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