

Luke 22:47-53
The Betrayal

Perhaps you can think of a time when you failed someone who was very important to you. Maybe you let down your parents when you were younger. Maybe it was a best friend. Maybe it was your spouse. Or, perhaps you can appreciate the other side of the question. Perhaps you have been let down by someone. Maybe you can recall an instance where a person on whom you counted proved a disappointment.

Such failures are natural because we are sinful people. We are bound to make mistakes and those failures often carry with them the collateral damage of other people. But, hopefully, these failures are not intentional. That is, while we may fail others, surely we do not intend to do so. We mean to do well, but simply come up short. Our sinful nature simply gets the best of us.

I think of the disciples. The disciples were often misunderstanding and wrong-thinking. But as foolish as they sometimes sounded, and as muddled as they often were, they tried their best to get their minds around what Jesus was teaching. They followed Him faithfully and persevered despite the constant harassment and real physical threats. They may have let Him down on occasion, but they never intended to.

It was not so with Judas. The encounter Luke described in the garden of Gethsemane has become synonymous with betrayal. Judas' actions were not the consequence of a sin nature only. Nor were they the result of misunderstanding. His was a willful, premeditated, unrepentant choice to sin. The sorrow this must have caused Jesus, to see His former disciple approaching Him through the night with the sole intent of handing Him over to the religious and political authorities, must have been heartbreaking.

Setting

As we approach this moment, let us back up and recount the week. Using the texts of all four evangelists, we can piece together the general outlines of the days before the betrayal in the garden. Jesus had come to the little village of Bethany, a few miles outside Jerusalem, about a week before. He probably stayed at the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, and they no doubt took turns recounting the all too familiar story of the time Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead (I can't imagine Lazarus ever getting tired of telling that story!).

It was probably the Monday of Passion week when Jesus made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. He looked around a bit and then returned to the outskirts of Jerusalem. The next day He went into the city to preach in the temple, and specifically (and violently) targeted the corruption surrounding the sacrificial system of Judaism. Tuesday night, He returned for safety to the home of friends (probably Simon the leper) near the Mount of Olives.

On Wednesday, Jesus again entered Jerusalem and taught in the temple complex. On this occasion, His subject was whether to pay taxes, if there was a resurrection, the second coming of the Messiah, and the establishment of the kingdom of God. He continued to be challenged by the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians. Thursday was probably spent with His disciples and in making preparations for the Passover

feast. He celebrated that Thursday evening. During that evening, He washed His disciples feet, prayed passionately for them, gave them His final teachings, and instituted a new memorial.

After dinner, Jesus took His disciples to a private garden the owner of which had permitted Jesus to use for so peace and solitude. Taking His disciples with them, He ordered eight of them to wait and pray while He took some Peter, James, and John for a little walk. Leaving those three to pray together, Jesus took some time to be alone. When He returned to the little group, they had fallen asleep. Jesus roused them gently, and when they had rejoined the others, He exhorted them to pray that their faith would remain strong.

The Crowd

Luke writes that “while He was still speaking, behold, a crowd came” (v. 47). Their sound would have startled the dozen men trying to find their bearing as they awakened from sleep. There was an abruptness to their arrival. The disciples would have been stunned at first, and then terrified when they recognized not only the size of the mob but the groups of which it was composed.

The makeup of the crowd showed that this was not a spontaneous coming together of Jesus’ enemies. Judas, after leaving the Passover feast, had gone to meet his accomplices. There must have been a sense of urgency, since they had a opportunity to take Jesus apart from the crowds. The meeting had been prearranged, since the chief priests had not yet themselves eaten the Passover supper (John 18:28). They had simply been waiting for Judas to arrive and tell them it was time to go.

The remainder of the Sanhedrin had to be informed. Annas, the current high priest, had to be notified, if he was not among the original chief priest with whom Judas met. They also had to rouse the temple guard. Thinking that they might need help, they needed to meet with Pilate and requisition as many Roman soldiers from those at Fort Antonia as they could get. And all of this must be done quickly and with great secrecy, lest word get out and those loyal to this rebellious rabbi spread the word and give Jesus a chance to escape.

We have no way of knowing if Judas knew that Jesus would be in the garden. But, Jesus went there often so it would be a good place to look. Maybe that was the first place the went. Or, perhaps they had already gone to the room where the supper had been eaten. Not finding Jesus there, the garden may have seemed another likely option.

Luke gives us no details in describing the crowd, but a reasonable assumption based on the accounts in the four evangelists is that at the front would have been Judas, accompanied by the servant of the high priest, Malchus. Then there were the temple guard, ruling elders of the temple, and Roman troops. John writes that Judas had with him a cohort of Roman troops from the garrison. While Rome was always enthusiastic in putting down any whisper of rebellion in the provinces, it seems unlikely that an entire cohort of 600 men would have been released from Fort Antonia to acquire on rogue rabbi and His dozen followers. And the word need not be taken literally. Still, it was Passover, and this rabbi did claim to be starting a revolution to establish a new kingdom. So perhaps 200-300 men would be spared to assist the Jewish leaders in their business.

One might wonder why soldiers were there at all. Weren't the temple guard sufficient? Perhaps they could not be trusted. Perhaps the chief priests and other religious leaders feared they might join the Jesus movement. Curious also, is the fact that the crowd carried lanterns and torches. It would have been a full moon that night, so no light would have been necessary. Unless, of course, they expected their prey to flee and the need to search for Him in the dark corners of the countryside would be required.

Whatever the specific composition of the crowd, three truths emerge. First, the crowd was unjust. Jesus had not committed any crime. He had not violated any law (either Jewish or Roman). He had healed the sick, freed the demon-possessed, fed the hungry, and raised the dead. Yes, he had challenged the perceived truths of the Jewish hierarchy, but any good rabbi would engage in vibrant debate of the religious issues of the day. Jesus had done nothing criminal.

Second, the crowd was irrational. What had Jesus ever done to them? To be sure, the Roman soldiers were merely following orders, but the temple guard not been harmed by Jesus. Even the ruling authorities had only to take a step back from their position, reflect on the truth of what Jesus preached, and recognize their error. These men were slaves of their passions, not their reason.

Finally, the crowd was, like most crowds are, cowardly. Jesus and His men were relatively unarmed and certainly no threat to the public order. The crowd carried swords (Roman soldiers) and clubs (temple guards). The force sent out to make the arrest was completely out of proportion to the needs of the moment. This was simply the desperate act of frightened men.

The Betrayer

We can only imagine the shock - or was it disgust - with which the disciples saw that "the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was preceding them" (v. 47). Did some of them wonder "what is Judas doing with those men?" Did others mumble "I knew he would be the one." We do not know. Nor can we explain why Judas, after three years of being under the mentorship of Jesus, turned against Him.

It is remarkable how discreet Luke (and the other evangelists as well) is in referring to Judas. It would not surprise us to read a violent attack on the wickedness of the crime and the despicable character of the betrayer. Instead, Luke relates the scene with amazing dispassion. Later Christian writers were not so forgiving, and an entire mythology developed around the betrayer of the Christ.

In the *Acts of Pilate* (approximately 4th century) Judas was reported to have gone home after betraying Jesus and threatened to kill himself, since he believed Jesus would rise from the dead to take vengeance. His wife, who was then cooking a chicken, said that Jesus had no more chance or rising from the dead than the chicken had of leaping out of the fire and crowing. At that moment, the chicken did just that thing.

In the medieval text of *The Story of Joseph of Arimathea*, Judas was reported to have been the brother of the former high priest Caiaphas and was used by him to infiltrate the band of disciples and betray Jesus.

In the twelfth century *The Legendary Aura*, the story was told that Judas was thrown into the sea as a baby because he was, even at that age, so evil his parents believed he should be put to death. However, he survived and married a beautiful older woman, only to discover later that she was his mother.

Luke does none of this. Simply recording the facts, Luke prosaically writes that Judas “approached Jesus to kiss Him” (v. 47). Why the kiss? Certainly, though it was a full moon, the trees of the garden could have obscured the light sufficiently to make it difficult to pick Jesus out of the small group He was with. Also, while Judas knew Jesus, the others may only have recognized Him from His times of teaching in the temple. The chief priests perhaps assumed that it was part of Jesus’ plan to have one of His followers pretend to be Him so He could slip away? Judas and the others could not be certain, so a quick, simple form of identifying the right man was necessary.

The kiss was intimate. That is, Judas did not kiss the hem of Jesus’ clothes, or the back of His hand, or His feet. He kissed Jesus on the cheeks. The wording in the text suggests this was done with passion and enthusiasm. He greeted Jesus as a close friend. He greeted Him as a brother. He greeted Him as he had greeted Him countless times before, as one of the disciples. Judas called Jesus rabbi (Matthew 26:49). But Jesus cut him short, before He reached Jesus, He “said to him, ‘Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?’” (v. 48).

Judas was undeterred. Continuing to approach Jesus Judas kissed him (Matthew 26:49). Jesus did not try to escape. He did not rally His men to fight. Looking Judas in the eye “Jesus said to him, ‘friend, do what you have come for.’ Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and seized Him” (Matthew 26:50). Jesus at the very end called Judas a friend. That cannot be missed. He bore him no ill-will, He did not hate. He knew Judas was damned, and it is not possible to think Jesus felt anything but compassion for his lost soul.

The Disciples

Jesus took His arrest with patience and submission. His followers were less composed. When those who were around Him saw what was going to happen, they said, “Lord, shall we strike with the sword?” (v. 49). Whence this boldness? The answer is found in the account of the arrest recorded by John, who was an eyewitness. He wrote that “⁴Jesus, knowing all the things that were coming upon Him, went forth and said to them, ‘Whom do you seek?’ ⁵They answered Him, ‘Jesus the Nazarene.’ He said to them, ‘I am He.’ And Judas also, who was betraying Him, was standing with them. ⁶So when He said to them, ‘I am He,’ they drew back and fell to the ground” (John 18:4-6).

Such an act of power made the disciples ready to fight. One of them, it was Peter, of course (John 18:10), not waiting for an answer to the question, “struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear” (v. 50). Peter was brave, but to a point. He attacked not the Roman soldiers or even the temple guard. He instead targeted the servant of the high priest. Perhaps, in his defense, Peter simply struck at whoever was in front, and the hapless Malchus took the blow.

Was Peter motivated by his own foolish boasts of a hour or so before? Perhaps. Notice also that the physician Luke notes that it was the right ear. Can we determine from that that Peter was left-handed?

In any case, Jesus would have none of this. His kingdom was not of this world, and it would not be maintained by resorting to the strategies of this world. Jesus “answered and said, ‘stop! No more of this.’ And He touched his ear and healed him” (v. 51). Notice that not only did Jesus never sin, He also did not allow the effects of sin done on His behalf to remain uncorrected. In the more revealing account by Matthew we discover that Jesus gave three reasons for this rebuke of Peter.

First, such resistance would be futile. Jesus said that “all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword” (Matthew 26:52). If Peter, or any of the other disciples chose violent resistance, they would be executed. Jesus had to die. They had to live. How else was the Church to spread. They understood little of this, but Jesus knew what needed to be done. This was not a battle they could win by force.

Second, it was unnecessary. Jesus reminded them that “do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels?” (Matthew 26:53). Jesus did not need their help. Since one angel is recorded in Scripture as killing 185,000 Assyrians (2 Kings 19:35), the devastation of tens of thousands of angels cannot be measured. Jesus was quite in command of the situation and, if He chose to free Himself, He could do so at any time.

Finally, it was not within the plan of God. Jesus pointed out that if the disciples resisted and did, somehow, manage to buy time for Jesus to escape, “how then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, which say that it must happen this way?” (Matthew 26:54). Jesus knew that the time had come for Him to die. This was why He had been incarnated in the first place. This was what His life was for.

The Savior

Jesus then faced the crowd. “⁵²Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders who had come against Him, ‘have you come out with swords and clubs as you would against a robber?

⁵³While I was with you daily in the temple, you did not lay hands on Me; but this hour and the power of darkness are yours” (v. 52-53). His power, His presence, subdued them. They allowed Him to speak. They had not even the authority over Him to make Him be silent.

His questions was, of course, rhetorical. In human terms, they had not arrested Him because they feared the crowds and Jesus’ popularity while teaching in the temple had overawed the religious leaders. In spiritual terms, Jesus had not been arrested earlier in the week because it was not God’s timing. His will, His perfect plan, required things to unfold just as they did. As the sword-swinging Peter would remind many of these people a few months later, “²²Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know - ²³this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death” (Acts 2:22-23).

Takeaways

There have always been those who profess Christ outwardly, but who are not saved. Like Judas, they reject the truth despite the fact that they have every opportunity and appear to many to be among the saints of God. As a result, wicked acts have been done under a show of love to Christ. Church history is filled with such sins. It has cost the Church its reputation and has been used by Satan to hinder God's work in the lives of people.

Another thing we can take away from Peter's role in all this is that it is far easier to fight for Christ than to suffer for Him. To fight requires the action of only a moment. To suffer requires commitment for the long haul. We can all rally in an instant. It is maintaining our faith for the duration that is the true test. Suffering quietly and patiently is more difficult than speaking out. Therefore let us not always prefer the outspoken believer. There will always be more crusaders than martyrs, as we shall see next week with Peter.