

The Man from Kerioth ***Mark 14:10-21***

***A love that's perfect casts out fear;
We can't be Luke and Demas, too.
Nor can we be both far and near,
For real salvation's not a stew***

***Commingling darkness and the Light,
While going in still staying out,
For Dawn obliterates the night.
The Lord's last liberating shout***

***Is true of grace but also sin.
We can't ignore what David asked,
Assuming we can enter in
Yet hide our sin behind a mask.***

***We must uproot each wanton weed,
Abhorring even shades of gray.
We cannot leave a root or seed
Of sin and walk the narrow way.***

Jerusalem was packed with Passover pilgrims. They crowded every inn. Hills around the city were freckled with campsites. And cravens of smoke from the cooking fires rose up to smudge the sky.

Farmers and fishermen from Galilee, shopkeepers from Joppa, and wealthy merchants from as far away as Antioch and Alexandria crowded cobbled side streets and covered lanes, pushing their way through the press of people to the temple.

Along with them, a man from Kerioth slipped silently from shadow to shadow. He was headed for the temple, too. But worship was the farthest thing from his mind.

This was Judas. His destination was the Sanhedrin's council room at a far end of the forest of columns on Solomon's Porch.

Judas spent three years at the Savior's side. Now the only Judean Christ called was about to deliver Him over to His enemies.

Our Lord commanded us to be perfect just as our Heavenly Father is perfect. And that is to be every Christian's goal. But we all know that, this side of Heaven, perfection is not possible.

However, something terrifying is very possible. It is a nightmare to contemplate. But it is horribly possible to be a Judas one day and betray the Lord who loves us.

So we must not spit out Judas' name with contempt. Neither do we dare to dismiss him as devil or a demon. Instead, we must take him as a warning. We must sift through the record of his life to find the foul seeds that turned a man from a friend to a foe.

The Plot

By the time the sun had climbed up to bathe and bake the building stones of Bethany, Judas was gone. He arose early that morning. The memory of money wasted and the Master's rebuke at the banquet the night before still smoldered inside him. So sometime that morning, he managed to slip away.

Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went off to the chief priests in order to betray Him to them. Verse 10

Don't be misled. Judas didn't stumble and fall into sin. No, step by step, he descended a stairway that spiraled slowly down into darkness that was deeper than even he imagined.

Back in Galilee, Judas was just another face in the crowd that followed the Master. Then after a long night of prayer, the Nazarene appointed twelve men to walk with Him as disciples.

Judas listened as Christ called out the names. And his heart soared when the Savior called out his.

From that moment on, Judas walked with Jesus, ate with Jesus, and curled up in his bedroll beside Jesus each night. Every day, he listened to the Lord's lessons. He even traveled to dusty villages and country crossroad to speak to strangers about the Man from Nazareth and proclaim Him as the Messiah sent from God.

Judas followed Jesus, learned from Jesus, even served Jesus. But somehow he failed to form a firm foundation of faith in Christ. And the Master knew it from the very beginning.

Jesus answered them, "Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?" John 6:70

Perhaps Judas thought faith would sprout in his heart like a ditch weed, blooming and blossoming without any plowing or planting. But faith must always begin with firm decision.

Faith is a seed that sprouts from a solid choice to place personal faith in Christ as our one and only Lord. And Judas didn't do that.

Nevertheless, the other eleven appointed apostles never noticed anything odd or unusual about Judas. From all appearances, he loved and trusted the Master as much as they did.

Even in the upper room when Jesus announced that one of them would betray Him, no one suspected that man was Judas.

As they were reclining at the table and eating, Jesus said, "Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me--one who is eating with Me." They began to be grieved and to say to Him one by one, "Surely not I?" Verses 18-19

Even when our Lord clearly identified Judas as the betrayer and sent him away to carry out his dark deed, the disciples refused to believe Judas was a false pretender: a wolf in sheep's clothing.

Jesus said to him, "What you do, do quickly." Now no one of those reclining at the table knew for what purpose He had said this to him. For some were supposing, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus was saying to him, "Buy the things we have need of for the feast"; or else, that he should give something to the poor. John 13:27-29

Judas' downward spiral began simply. Deep inside, he harbored a hidden hunger for riches. So Judas was overjoyed when Jesus asked him to keep the money bag and serve as treasurer.

But as they traveled, the coins jingled in Judas' pocket and temptation grew. And before long, he began to secretly steal some of the shining shekels out of the bag.

That was like leaving a back door open in a dangerous neighborhood. Someone dark and deadly was watching for just such a hole in the hedge. And that someone was Satan.

The adversary was quick to notice a door of lust was left open in the disciple's life. Then that last Wednesday, the devil came to Judas, not with a threat, but with a soft whisper in his ear.

And Satan entered into Judas who was called Iscariot, belonging to the number of the twelve. And he went away and discussed with the chief priests and officers how he might betray Him to them. Luke 22:3-4

When Judas got to the High Priest's chambers, the ruling Jews were more than willing to hear him. They were eager and elated.

They were glad when they heard this, and promised to give him money. And he began seeking how to betray Him at an opportune time. Verse 11

The old priests could see Judas wasn't out for revenge. His motive was money, not malice.

Then one of the twelve, named Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, "What are you willing to give me to betray Him to you?" And they weighed out thirty pieces of silver to him. Matthew 26:14-15

The powerful old priests bargained Judas down to thirty silver shekels. They didn't really care how much they had to pay to see the Carpenter in chains. After all, they had no intention of paying the betrayer out of their own pockets, but out of temple offerings.

But thirty silver coins seemed an apt way to express their contempt for the Carpenter. It was the law's price for a slain slave.

When the negotiations were finished and the money Judas craved was in his pocket, he returned to Jesus's side. To the other disciples, he seemed the same as he always had: a loyal disciple.

But Judas was merely waiting and watching for the perfect time to deliver his Master into the hands of those who hated Him.

His sin was not yet consummated. But it was in full flower and ready to bear fruit. And if we plant seeds of lust within our own hearts, they will just as surely grow.

The Passover

The sun was high overhead and evening was still hours away. But the disciples' minds were all on Passover. It was time to prepare.

On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb was being sacrificed, His disciples said to Him, "Where do You want us to go and prepare for You to eat the Passover?" And He sent two of His disciples and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him; and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is My guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?"' And he himself will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; prepare for us there." The disciples went out and came to the city, and found it just as He had told them; and they prepared the Passover. Verses 12-16

There was a strange air of secrecy about it all. Jesus had made arrangements earlier with a man in the city. He even gave that man a way to identify himself, by sending a servant to carry a water pot.

There was an important reason for the secrecy that shrouded the Savior's assignment for Peter and John. Passover supper in a private room would be the perfect place for the priests. They could easily capture Him there without upsetting the crowds.

And that would never do. It was imperative that He celebrate this last Passover and the first Communion with His disciples before His suffering started.

So our Savior kept the place secret. Even the disciples who prepared the place didn't know where it was until they followed the man carrying a water pot. And Judas' plot was foiled.

Thursday evening in a green twilight, Jesus led His disciples to the guest room. Meanwhile, a watchman stood high up on the temple. He stared out over the wooded crest of the Mount of Olives, watching for the full moon to inch its way up into the darkening sky.

Then, when the moon finally cleared the horizon, the watchman blew a ram's horn. Passover had begun.

It was an ancient feast, instituted by Moses in Egypt. And like all Jewish feasts, it looked backward, forward, and inward.

It recalled the night an angel of death swept like a desert wind through Egypt, killing the firstborn child in every family. God had commanded His people to smear lamb's blood on the doorposts and lintels of their slave shacks. And when the angel saw the blood, he would pass over that house and everyone inside would live.

Each spring on the 15th day of Nisan, the Jews commemorated that night. They sacrificed a lamb and ate unleavened bread because their forefathers left Egypt so quickly there was no time for bread to rise. And they ate bitter herbs to remind them of the bitterness of their bondage as slaves under pharaoh's whip.

John and Peter spent the afternoon preparing for the feast. They had to buy a lamb at the temple market and have a priest sacrifice it for them. But that was not their first task.

First, they had to perform a ritual search of the upper room for any shred of leavened bread or yeast. Only after it had been removed from the quarters could the lamb be slain, roasted and eaten.

...on the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses...Seven days there shall be no leaven found in your houses; Exodus 12:15,19

Passover and the week-long Feast of Unleavened Bread that followed it also looked forward to the cross. Just as John the Baptist once said, the Passover lamb was a symbol for God's sinless Son: the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Also, in the Bible leaven is symbol for sin. So just as Jesus was without sin, there could be no leaven in the house where the slain lamb was eaten.

Finally, the feast was also an object lesson: a spiritual lesson in symbols. Even today, each Passover Jewish children make a game of searching for leaven before the supper begins. And in that, we see Judas' fatal error.

Before we can place personal trust in Jesus Christ as both our Savior and our loving Lord, we must first search for any shred of sin in our lives. With God's help, we must sift our hearts for any lust or larceny, any ugly attitude, aim or action that might lurk there.

Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. Psalm 139:23-24 (KJV)

We cannot trust in Christ's suffering and appropriate His payment for our sin until we complete that process. We must first search out every sin and lust. Then by His Spirit's help, we must forever put them behind us.

We cannot know to what degree Judas believed Jesus was the Messiah. But we do know his belief never translated into personal faith and full commitment. For one thing, he never repented of his craving for cold, hard cash. That lust was left to fester into sin, and sin into betrayal. That was the failure led to his downfall.

And if we duplicate his error, it will also lead to ours.

The Penalty

When Jesus told the Twelve that one of them who ate with Him would betray Him, they were all stricken with sorrow. Each one choked back tears and asked if perhaps he was the one who would do such a terrible thing.

When it was evening He came with the twelve. As they were reclining at the table and eating, Jesus said, "Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me--one who is eating with Me." They began to be grieved and to say to Him one by one, "Surely not I?" Verses 17-19

Matthew wrote that Judas also asked, "Surely not I, Lord?" But he only did so that he might not stand out and be identified. Unlike the other eleven, his heart was so hardened by sin, the

thought of betraying his best Friend didn't sting him at all.

That is the first penalty for nurturing a lust. It hardens our heart, searing and scalding our very soul like molten iron.

And all too soon, we do not feel the ugly edge of sin at all. We grow numb to the darkness that is poisoning our heart and leading us to outright rebellion.

Mark's bare bones account doesn't include the moment Jesus sent Judas away before He celebrated the first Lord's Supper. But it was essential for our Lord to send the betrayer away at that moment.

Those who refuse to repent of their lusts and lies have no part in the sweet fellowship with the Christ that Communion represents. And here on earth, that is the most terrible penalty sin causes.

It destroys our fellowship with the One who loves us so much He died for us. If we refuse to turn our back on our sin, we forfeit the oceans of peace, the fountains of joy, and the limitless love only Christ can give us.

But even that is not the full and final penalty for unrepented sin.

And He said to them, "It is one of the twelve, one who dips with Me in the bowl. For the Son of Man is to go just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born." Verses 20-21

After Judas led soldiers to Gethsemane and identified Jesus, the betrayer was stricken with remorse. Suddenly, those thirty silver shekels weren't a treasure at all but a deadly weight.

So he tried to return them to the hard hearted old priests. Then, without even seeking forgiveness, he put a rope around his neck and hung himself. But that was not the end for Judas.

There was still an eternity of torment and torture ahead. Tears of remorse and grinding guilt weren't enough to save him. And he descended into the arching agony and endless horror of hell.

In the end, it won't matter how much guilt we feel about our sins. All that will matter is what we have done with our lusts, our lies and our larcenies.

There is no shortcut. We must make a conscious decision to turn our back on our sins. By the power of our Savior's Spirit we must forever leave them behind. There can be no salvation if we don't.

And there will be hell to pay.