

The Midnight Kiss

Mark 14:43-51

***Love unrequited is a curse,
But love pretended is much worse.
It echoes from the dark abyss:
Dost thou betray Me with a kiss?***

***A psalm that's sung without real love
Can't serenade in halls above
With angel choirs and cherubim.
Dost thou betray Me with a hymn?***

***A pious prayer for men to hear
Is but a cynic's secret sneer,
A dark depiction of despair.
Dost thou betray Me with a prayer?***

***It's Judas' sin to pray and sing
Yet not obey Christ as our King
And as the Ancient of all Days.
Dost thou betray Me with thy praise?***

Suddenly, the disciples were wide awake. Far off across the bridge, they heard the tramp of feet and clatter of armor coming down the hill. And through the limbs of the old olive trees, they could see torches winking in the darkness.

They all scrambled to their feet. Their hearts in their throats, they stood wide eyed, stunned like deer caught in a headlamp.

Only Christ was calm. He could feel the fear that gripped His friends. And He wished He could take all their anxiety away and fill them with His peace.

That is why He spent the evening pouring His wisdom into their ears. He was preparing them for this moment of terror.

For three years, teaching had been the Master's primary purpose. Walking down footpaths and through crowded markets, He spent His time training these men.

But as soldiers clattered down the hill and over the bridge, no time was left for teaching. It was time to begin the great eternal task He had come all the way from Heaven to fulfill.

Time to stand the whirlwind of God's wrath. Time to die.

Deception

Judas was a careful, calculating man. The idea to turn Jesus over to the old priests came slowly.

Walking dusty roads in Galilee and watching orange coals crumble in campfires, he hatched a plan.

He thought it all out, searching his mind for loopholes and lapses in his strategy. Then when Passover came, all the pieces were in place. He knew the ruling Jews' great fear was a popular uprising. So the only time to capture the Man many people called Christ was at night. And Judas knew the perfect place to do it.

The old priests were thrilled to find a turncoat who knew the Carpenter so well. But they shouldn't have been.

Even after three years at the Savior's side, Judas really didn't know Jesus at all. And everything he did that night proves it.

For instance, Judas urged the priests to bring soldiers and temple policemen.

Immediately while He was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, came up accompanied by a crowd with swords and clubs, who were from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. Verse 43

Judas also advised the arresting party to be well armed and to keep Christ closely guarded. So soldiers carried close combat swords. Along with them were temple police, armed with riot clubs.

Judas knew what he would do if he was in Jesus' place. He wouldn't be taken without a fight. But really, there was no need for swords and clubs, for policemen and soldiers.

Judas should have known Jesus wouldn't resist. Had it been so long since the sparkling spring day when Jesus sat on the green grass of a hillside overlooking the blue waters of Gennesaret and taught?

...love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; Luke 6:27-29

I suppose Judas could have forgotten what the Redeemer said that day. But more likely, he simply didn't believe the Man he followed. After all, religious teaching is one thing. Reality is another.

However, the Master meant every word He said. Each moment of each day, He lived by the truths He taught. And He demands that those who follow Him do the same.

Judas also doubted Christ's courage. He thought the Master might try to hide himself among His followers. So he prearranged a sign with the priests.

Now he who was betraying Him had given them a signal, saying, "Whomever I kiss, He is the one; seize Him and lead Him away under guard." Verse 44

Today, close friends shake hands when they meet. But then, men exchanged a formal kiss on the cheek.

So just in case the soldiers didn't know which man was Jesus, Judas prearranged to personally identify Him with a kiss. And that is just what he did.

After coming, Judas immediately went to Him, saying, "Rabbi!" and kissed Him. Verse 45

It is almost unbelievable. But even standing at the head of armed soldiers in the orange glow of torchlight in the garden, Judas didn't drop his mask of faithfulness and friendship.

He had pretended piety so long, he was smug and sure the Savior didn't suspect how false and fake his friendship really was.

The Greek word for Judas' *kiss* describes a fervent, heart-felt expression of love. It was used of the woman who washed Jesus' feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. And Jesus used it to describe the kiss the prodigal's father gave his returning son.

But Judas' kiss was an empty imitation of that intense love. Even with a squad of soldiers spiked with drawn swords behind him, he believed he could deceive God's Son. He had feigned faithfulness and pretended piety so long, he was convinced Christ could still be fooled by false praise and pretended friendship.

But Jesus was never fooled by Judas' play acting. From the very beginning the Lord knew Judas' heart was full of lusts and lies.

The Savior always knew the man from Kerioth was a wolf in sheep's clothing. And early on,

He said so.

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

We must never make Judas' mistake. Christ is never fooled by piety and praise that doesn't come from a heart overflowing with love for our Lord. And nothing is quite so disgusting to our Savior as praise that is all pretense.

He takes no pleasure in those who call Him Savior, Lord and Master yet have no love, faith and obedience in their hearts.

Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? Luke 6:46

Judas was more than a lying enemy. He was also a fool. He believed he could deceive the God who reads the hearts of men like a preschool primer. And we are even greater fools if we believe we can please God with sweet hymns, pious prayers and loud praise when our lives show we neither love nor trust Him.

Pretended praise and hollow worship are echoes of an empty heart. And they are positive proof that we really don't know Jesus.

If we did, we couldn't help but love Him. We would know from sweet experience that He sticks closer than a brother.

If we have ever tasted of our Lord's love, we can't help but know how good He is to all who lay their lives in His hands.

O taste and see that the Lord is good; how blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him! O fear the Lord, you His saints; for to those who fear Him there is no want. Psalm 34:8-9

Judas' real problem was that he never trusted the Savior for a single moment. So he had never tasted God's goodness.

And if our praise is as empty as his was, we haven't either.

Darkness

Of course, Judas' kiss was unnecessary. Jesus had no intention of hiding among His followers. In fact, when the soldiers arrived, the Master willingly identified Himself.

Jesus, knowing all the things that were coming upon Him, went forth and said to them, "Whom do you seek?" They answered Him, "Jesus the Nazarene." He said to them, "I am He." John 18:4-5

That was all the high priest needed. Without a word, the soldiers seized the Savior.

They laid hands on Him and seized Him. Verse 46

While Christ didn't resist, He did aim a pointed question at the old priests, forcing them to face themselves and their dark hearts.

And Jesus said to them, "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest Me, as you would against a robber? Every day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize Me; but this has taken place to fulfill the Scriptures." Verses 48-49

Rebels who warred against Roman rule financed their insurrection with armed robbery. So they had to be taken by force at night while they were sleeping.

But Jesus wasn't a zealot. They could have taken Him anytime they chose. They didn't even have to worry about a riot among the Passover pilgrims that crowded the city.

The Redeemer always arrived at temple early in the morning. And for two long weeks, He stood in the shadows of the forest of pillars on Solomon's porch and taught.

Temple police could have easily marched out onto the temple courtyard and taken Him then. But they didn't.

And the reason why the ruling Jews didn't arrest Jesus in broad daylight is simple. They preferred darkness.

While 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. Luke 22:53

Darkness ruled the hearts of the old priests. That is why they chose to act at night. The prince of darkness reigned over them. So they hated both the light of day and the Light of the World.

...everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. John 3:20

Just like their malignant master, the old priests preferred darkness and secrecy. After all, God is the one who stands for truth and full disclosure in the light of day.

Also, the old priests worked in darkness while Jerusalem slept out of fear. Sure, there were often only a few worshipers when Jesus taught on the temple courtyard early in the morning.

Nevertheless, the priests still feared what they might do. It was illogical and unreasonable to fear so few. But living in the darkness of sin always breathes fear into the hearts of men.

The wicked flee when no one is pursuing, but the righteous are bold as a lion. Proverbs 28:1

Strengthened by the power of God's Spirit and armed with the wisdom of His Word, those who trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord can afford to be bold. Living in the light of God's love always produces real courage.

Of course, in the priests' mind, they had good reason to fear how the people might react if they dragged the Teacher away in chains at the temple when everyone was watching. They owed their powerful positions to the Roman rulers. And Rome hated popular uprisings.

So the old priests crept around in darkness. A riot might cost them their rich robes and spacious villas. And fear of punishment is another sure sign a man has never known God's perfect love.

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. 1 John 4:18

The rulers of the temple wore masks of piety and pride. But inside they were filled with fear of what powerful men might do to them. And that too is a result of indulging a dark heart.

The old priests looked at Judas with unbridled contempt. But they were just as surrounded and saturated with the devil's darkness as he was. Sure, they spent their days with prayers and rituals.

But their fear of men proves God wasn't really their loving Helper but their righteous Judge.

The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me. Hebrews 13:6 (KJV)

Only the blood of Jesus Christ can chase the darkness from our lives. And we can only live in the light of His love by choosing to trust in Him. If we don't, we are just like those priests.

We are doomed to live and die in the darkness of fear.

Defeat

For one wild, chaotic moment, confusion erupted in the garden. The soldiers seized the Savior. And in that instant, one disciple sprang to His defense.

But one of those who stood by drew his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his ear. Verse 47

When Matthew, Mark and Luke wrote their gospel accounts, the church was under attack. All over the Roman empire, believers were being imprisoned, tortured and murdered. So those gospel writers were careful not to endanger the lives of God's people. That is why they withheld the name of that sword swinging disciple.

But by the time John wrote his gospel account, all the other apostles had died. And there was no longer any need to protect them.

So John identified the disciple who struck the high priest's servant in the orange flash of torch light that night.

Simon Peter then, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear; and the slave's name was Malchus. John 18:10

Actually, Peter tried to hack the man's skull in half. But Malchus was quick enough to dodge the blow and limit the damage to the loss of one ear.

In our eyes, Peter's attack seems to show great courage. But bravery doesn't reside in reflexes

or adrenaline.

The greatest courage is shown when we dare to trust ourselves completely to God. And Jesus was quick to remind Peter of that.

Jesus said to Peter, "Put the sword into the sheath; the cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?" John 18:11

Peter acted out of instinct and emotion, not courage. Christ was the model of courage, trusting Himself to His Father's perfect will.

When Peter stepped forward to defend the Lord he loved, he didn't act out of faith, either. The Master might have looked helpless surrounded by soldiers. But He was still the Lord of the universe. And God never needs to be defended by mere men.

...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

God didn't need anyone to defend His honor then. And He doesn't today. We must never forget that nothing in all the world depends upon us.

If we believe everything is up to us rather than God, our faith is just as false as Judas' kiss. Our God has need of nothing, surely not the frantic, faithless efforts of weak and wayward men like us.

Neither was Peter acting in love. Christ commanded us to do good to those who oppose us, not wage war against them.

Even in the worst of circumstances, our Savior expects His servants to have the courage to trust God's will, the faith to submit to His sovereignty, and the love to obey Him. If we do not, we are nothing at all like Jesus. We are like Judas.

With the Redeemer's rebuke, Peter's thin veneer of courage fled away. And in sheer panic, he and the rest of the disciples ran wildly off into the darkness.

And they all left Him and fled. A young man was following Him, wearing nothing but a linen sheet over his naked body; and they seized him. But he pulled free of the linen sheet and escaped naked. Verses 50

Only Jesus stood, serene and calm. He knew He was in the center of His Father's will. And there is no more perfect place.