

## **In the Garden: The Betrayal**

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Matthew 26:44-50

*So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand." While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him." At once he came up to Jesus and said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed him. Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you are here to do." Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and arrested him. Matthew 26:44-50 (NRSV)*

Join with me in prayer. *Gracious God open us up. Open our eyes that we might see and our ears that we might hear, then open our hearts, God, that we might feel. And then, O Lord, open our hands that we might serve. Amen.*

I received a call one morning and the man on the other end of the phone clearly was upset. He told me that he had picked up his wife's telephone and seen text messages between her and another man. They were exchanging words of love and he was heartbroken. And in the midst of it he used the phrase from the Scripture, "My betrayer is at hand."

Have you ever been betrayed? A woman shared with me that her business partner of many, many years, they'd discovered had been embezzling money for almost all of the years they'd worked together. It had drained her company and her retirement, and she felt just betrayed. "My Betrayer is at hand."

Or perhaps there is a coworker who you thought was supporting and encouraging you and you found that that coworker was really working against you all that time.

"My Betrayer is at hand."

Or maybe your spouse you discover has not been sharing with you the truth about the financial situation in your family. You feel betrayed. Or a friend who you had shared a secret with had shared it with others around you. You thought it had been in confidence. You feel so betrayed.

You thought you were going to get that promotion. You'd been told you were going to get it, but someone else got it. You felt betrayed.

So many ways we experience betrayal and all of them so painful. They upset our sense of trust in the world. We look around and think, "I really believed that this person was true. And really loved and cared about me and that they were being honest with me, that I could trust them. Yet it wasn't true all along. I wonder if everything else I've seen and everything else that's around me - is it real or is it also a fake?"

And the difficulty is that you have this contrast between what appears to be the case, and what you believe to be the case and what really is.

This story of Judas in the garden coming to Jesus at night and betraying him with a kiss. To be calling him "Rabbi!" The irony is just so clear, so straightforward.

I've been betrayed but I can't imagine anything like the kind of betrayal Jesus experienced.

Here's the other thing. I have been betrayed but I've also been the betrayer. The one who does the betraying. And what I think is so real and powerful about this story is that it's obvious there's so much pain in Jesus in being betrayed. But there's also this incredible pain in Judas as the one who does the betraying. To realize that you have hurt the person you love so much, the anguish you feel because of what you have done to someone you love that much.

Here's what I believe. I believe the kiss was real. I believe that Judas really loved Jesus, he really cared about Jesus so the inner conflict he feels as he's turning him over and expressing his love at the same time. Well, where does it leave him?

There are really two different images in Scripture about how Judas dies. The Gospel of Matthew relates that he hanged himself. In the book of Acts, it speaks of Judas falling headlong into a field and dying. But both descriptions are of remorse, of just an incredible anguish that Judas feels.

Whether you are the betrayed or the betrayer you're going to feel the pain. And you know what? I believe that in each one of us there is both Judas and Jesus. That living within us is the potential, in fact, the reality of being the one who's betrayed and the one who's the betrayer.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, the famous author was imprisoned in the Soviet gulag for many years and when he came out, he wrote the book *The Gulag Archipelago*. Here's what he writes: "If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds and were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart? This line shifts inside us. It oscillates with the years. And even within hearts overwhelmed by evil one small bridgehead of good is retained."

The line that divides good and evil runs through every one of us. There is a Judas and a Jesus inside each of us. And when we get in touch with either one in these moments of betrayal, oh, it's painful!

Now the question of course is why did Judas do this? What was the motive that Judas had in betraying Jesus? Well, the Gospel of Matthew says he did it for 30 pieces of silver. So maybe just greed is the motive. Some scholars believe that Judas was a Zealot, and a particular kind of Zealot. The Zealots were those who were fighting against the Romans and were leading the charge for Jewish independence. One kind of Zealot was called the *Sicarii* and they would carry a little curved dagger that they would keep in their robes. They were kind of like spies of sorts or assassins and they would go into a crowd and there would be a Roman soldier or a sympathizer with the Romans. And they'd use that little dagger and just kill them on the spot. They they'd slip away.

Some believe that the word Judas Iscariot means Judas the Sicarii. Others believe it simply means he's from the town of Kerioth which also sounds like Iscariot. It could be that Judas was trying to make Jesus a martyr so that the revolution against the Romans would come to pass.

The Gospel of John and the Gospel of Luke simply say, "And Satan entered into Judas." What you see in Scripture there is this interesting strange perspective where on the one hand Judas this deed that he did was so evil. Yet at the same time it was what set into motion the events that led to the whole salvation of the world. And you see that as you read the Scripture. Jesus says to him in the passage that we just read. Jesus said to him, "Friend, come do what you come to do." It's almost as if there's this drama playing out and he's saying to Judas, "Now you play your part. You've got to be the bad guy."

You can see that in the book of Acts. It says, "Friends, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit through David foretold concerning Judas who became a guide for those who arrested Jesus."

This picture of it setting into motion - that God uses even this terrible act of betrayal as part of God's purpose to save the world.

Now I suspect that if you asked Judas what his motive was, "Why did you do it?" Judas might say, "I had my reasons." We say that all the time. "I had my reasons." When we betray someone there's always a reason behind it. There's always some motivation. Sometimes it's clear to us that we've done this terrible thing, and sometimes we think we're doing it for the right reasons. The wrong thing perhaps but for the right reasons.

I was listening to someone recently and they made this great comment. They said, "You know, rationalization is the key to good mental health." I thought that was kind of funny, but I realize that's part of what happens. We have this cognitive dissonance inside us about what we've done and what we're experiencing. We look for ways for those reasons to come to pass. Each one of us - we've got our reasons.

So, what do we do then? What do we do then when we experience betrayal? I think we can look at what Jesus did, and we can learn a lot from the incredible love that Jesus showed.

It occurred to me that this Passover meal where he gathered his disciples where Judas was sitting there. And while Judas was sitting there, he knew Judas had already begun the process of betraying him. He'd already talked to the Sanhedrin. He'd already made a deal with them to betray Jesus. In fact, the Scripture says that Jesus knew. And yet he still offered him this meal of love. "This is my body, given out of love for you. This is my blood shed for you."

Can you imagine what it would be like to go to a Valentine's dinner with the person you love, knowing that they were betraying you? And still be able to offer your love to them? Wow - I'm not sure I'd have that kind of power.

Here's what I hope you would learn. For the Judas within you, for the Judas within each one of us, I hope this Scripture teaches us is that there is nothing we can do, there is no betrayal that is beyond the arms of Jesus' love. No betrayal that is so terrible that Jesus can't take hold of us and bring us back.

I always thought I knew the story of John Newton as the slave trader who wrote the hymn "Amazing Grace." What I knew was that he was a slave trader, he became a Christian and then he quit being a slave trader and wrote "Amazing Grace." That was the story I had in my head. But the story is far more complex than that. By the way I think it's true with most of us that the stories are more complex than the simple answers. Newton was a slave trader, but he began on the sea when he was only 11 years old with his father who was a ship captain. Then when he was a young teen, he joined the British Navy and while there he was in trouble all the time. He was a n'er-do-well. He was a drinker and in trouble all the time. In fact, it says that he received 80 lashes at some point in his time in the British Navy and ultimately was expelled from the Navy. And when that happened, he went to work on a ship called the "Pegasus" which was a slave trading ship. Even there he had trouble getting along with the crew. So, when they got to West Africa, they actually abandoned him, and left him there. He became the slave of a man named Amos Clowe who was a slave trader. And that man gave Newton as a slave to his own daughter and so Newton served as a slave to the daughter for a period to this African princess. Then his father sent a rescue boat to save him and he was saved and brought back from West Africa.

But on the way back just off the coast of Ireland the ship began to sink. They were in a storm and as the ship rolled in the storm some of the cargo rolled over and clogged the hole that was going to sink the ship. And Newton realized that in that moment that God was at work in his life. And there on the ship he gave his life to Christ, and believed he'd been saved for a purpose.

And what you'd think would happen, and what the story ought to say, is that he went back and gave up slave trading for the rest of his life, and wrote "Amazing Grace," and became an Anglican clergyman. But no, that's not what happened. He came back and worked on three more different slave ships. He was captain of three different slave ships the whole time. All the while talking about his Christian faith and how he'd been transformed by the Christian faith, and writing "Amazing Grace."

In 1754 he had a stroke and he had to quit. And it was 34 years later before he began to speak out about abolition. Here's what he wrote, and this is from a tract that he put out that became so well known that it became very popular. The pamphlet was called "Thoughts Upon the Slave Trade." He writes: "It will always be a subject of humiliating reflection to me that I was once an active instrument in a business at which my heart now shudders."

I wonder if there are things in your life that when you look back on, they seemed like the right thing to do. But as time's gone on you realized they were a betrayal. Here's the amazing thing - that God took John Newton in with his love and used him in amazing ways for his glory. Even you or me, we can be redeemed. That's the God we worship. Who continued to love even his betrayer.

Now if you in fact are the one who's betrayed, I hope you hear about the amazing, incredible love of God that's here, too. Because there's a Jesus inside you. Galatians 2:20 says it this way: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." That Christ who lives in you can love even through betrayal, just as Jesus did.

I ran across this incredible story the other day. On June 28, 2015 Suliman Abdul-Mutakallim was walking home outside of Cincinnati from a White Castle carrying a bag of food. And the police said he was attacked by three robbers, one of them called Javon Coulter was 14 years old and was seen in surveillance video pulling money from a front pocket of his pants right after a shooting. Turns out the money was less than \$60. The 39-year-old Navy veteran who they called Sam was still alive and was lying face down on the pavement bleeding. The video showed Javon hand that money to another young man, 17-year-old Valentino Pettis. Police believe that the third person was a man in his 20s and he was never charged. Suliman's mother was named Rukiye and at the court hearing about two years later just after Javon had pled guilty, she asked Hamilton County judge Megan Shanahan for permission to speak. Then she did something that courtroom veterans said they'd never seen. She walked up to Javon who had just admitted involvement in her son's death, and she hugged him, then she embraced Javon's mother. Here's the report from the Cincinnati newspaper: "Rukiye who is 66 said her son's killers are children who have mothers like herself. She wants to visit them in prison regularly and help them become better people. These young men, although they took my son's life in the manner they did, we need to fight for them because they're going to come back out and they will be older. But if they have no light then this, the same disease is going to repeat itself, and they're going to take another person's child's life and eventually their own. Every mother's heart must feel this. We have to fight for them to see that there's a better life. Then they have to fight to get where that better life is."

Friends, if you've been betrayed, there's a Christ inside you that lives in you that allows you to love like Jesus did. Even when betrayed. So, there's a Judas and a Jesus inside each one of us and when we come to terms with the ways we've been betrayed and the ways we've betrayed others there is great pain. But there is also this amazing love of Jesus that can reach through the ways we have betrayed or been betrayed, through every betrayal and speak words of love.

*Gracious and loving God, we thank you for the words of love, the offer of a welcome that you give each one of us. You know the pain of betrayal that we've been a part of, what we've experienced, how others may have betrayed us, and how we have betrayed others. So, pour your love into those places in our hearts that we might be healed. In the name of Christ, we pray. Amen.*