

SERMON MID-WEEK LENT 3 MAR. 23 2022

Midweek Lent 3: Mercy in Betrayal

He was an early hero of the American Revolution. He commanded the troops at the battle of Saratoga in 1777, leading them to a critical early victory over the British. His courageous leadership led George Washington to recognize him as “the bravest of the brave.”

Yet by 1780 he was disillusioned with the American cause. In fact, he arranged to sell secret military plans to the enemy for twenty thousand British pounds, betraying the country he’d previously defended.

Benedict Arnold has gone down in history as America’s greatest traitor. He betrayed his country for sterling silver. To Americans, Benedict Arnold’s name is associated with shame.

Another name has gone down in history as the world’s greatest traitor. He betrayed his Lord and God at a price of thirty pieces of silver. His name is Judas Iscariot.

Today we look at Judas’ betrayal and our betrayal as well. We do so, nevertheless, in view of Christ’s mercy.

Our text from Matthew 26 describes the scene.

Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane on the Thursday night of Passover. He has been praying to God for strength as he faces his destiny.

Verse 47 states that at that time **“Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a great crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people.”**

Now don’t miss what this verse says of Judas. It says that he was **“one of the twelve.”** He was one of the twelve disciples whom Jesus had handpicked to be his companions. Judas had followed Jesus, listened to his words and witnessed his miracles. Judas was a trusted confidant.

Yet eventually Judas turned against Christ. He collaborated with Jesus’ enemies, who wished to discredit and destroy the Lord. They needed an

informant—an insider—who would arrange for them to arrest Jesus quietly, away from the crowds.

And the price of the deal? Thirty silver coins, the price of a common slave. Judas would sell his master as a slave!

Moreover, Judas had provided an sinister signal, a kiss, to identify the target for arrest. Matthew reports: **“Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, ‘The one I will kiss is the man; seize him.’**

And he came up to Jesus at once and said, ‘Greetings, Rabbi!’ And he kissed him.”

Amazing! Judas used a symbol of love, of close friendship, to betray his master. Judas’ treachery was made clear by a gesture intended to express love. How painful it must have been for Jesus to receive this kiss. How shameful it was for Judas to sell out his Lord, his rabbi, with a kiss.

Benedict Arnold’s price for betrayal was twenty thousand British pounds. Judas Iscariot’s price for betrayal was 30 silver coins. The question facing us tonight is “What is our price to betray the Lord?”

Maybe your price of betrayal is the price of greed. Your love of money and material wealth are greater than your love for God. Your time and energy are consumed with making money instead of loving God with all your heart, soul and strength.

Maybe your price of betrayal is the price of ambition. The quest to climb to the top of your career trumps serving God in humility. You press toward your own selfish will over instead of God’s will.

Perhaps your price of betrayal is the price of acceptance by the world.

You are motivated to please people more than to please God. You want to impress the powerful and the popular in society at the expense of your confession of Christ. You don’t want to be ridiculed as a Christian, so you deny Jesus by your silence or submission to the world.

Perhaps your price of betrayal is the price of retaliation. You refuse to swallow your pride in order to forgive someone who has wronged you. Instead, you seek revenge, and in so doing, you betray the Lord who calls you to forgive.

You see, Judas isn't the only one who has betrayed the Lord. Every time we live in ways that are contrary to the Word of God, we betray God. In our sinful rebellion, we who bear the name of Christ bring shame to that name. We are traitors, too!

The Christian singer Michael Card has written a song with lyrics that hit close to home for us:

“Judas, don't you come too close! / I feel that I might see / The traitorous look upon your face / Might look too much like me! / 'Cuz just like you I've sold the Lord / And often for much less. / And like a wretched traitor / I've betrayed him with a kiss”

The gospel accounts are clear that Jesus knew beforehand that Judas would betray him.

In fact, Jesus announced his awareness of this betrayal hours before it happened. Yet at the Last Supper Jesus extended gestures of friendship and honor to Judas in the sharing of bread.

And just before Judas kisses him in Gethsemane, Jesus addressed Judas as “**friend**.” Christ's mercy was always available to Judas, even while Judas carried out his despicable deeds.

The price that Judas paid to betray Jesus was thirty pieces of silver. That was the price of a slave. In one sense that price was appropriate. In the Greek, the root of the of the words slave and servant are one in the same, “Doulos.”

Jesus willingly offered himself as a servant. He was prophesied by Isaiah to be the “**Servant of the Lord**,” the suffering servant.

Jesus himself claimed that his purpose was to be a servant when he said: “**The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.**”

The apostle Paul writes that Jesus, “**though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking on the form of a servant.**” (Philippians 2:6-7).

Jesus was willingly sold as a slave by the betrayal price of thirty shekels in order to purchase us from the slavery of sin.

He was betrayed at the hands of sinful men to demonstrate conclusively that God will never desert or betray us sinners.

The price of betrayal was thirty coins. But the price of our salvation is the blood of Jesus Christ. He gave his life as a ransom for many. He gave his life as a ransom for us.

So tonight we contemplate our betrayal of Christ, but we do so in view of God's mercy. Jesus was betrayed to death in order to ransom us from death.

To you and me—traitors all!—Christ offers the bread at the table as a gesture of love and as an invitation to forgiveness.

To you and me—traitors all!—Christ offers his blood shed on the cross for the remission of sins.

To you and me—traitors all!—Christ offers himself to death in order to purchase us from the slavery of sin.

In this penitential season of Lent, we come to him with deep contrition for our betrayal of him. Yet we also keep the cross in sight. We repent in view of God's mercy.

And because of the sacrifice of the Servant on the cross, we receive God's mercy and are deemed children of God—despite being traitors all!
AMEN