

Judas and Peter

Our reading from the Gospel of Luke brings our attention to two men, who were associated with the sufferings of Messiah: Judas who betrayed him, and Peter who denied him. For our considerations for today, we propose to examine both men, that we can learn from their examples and failures.

John chapter 6 describes how that the Lord who knew what was in man (Jno. 2:25), also knew who his betrayer would be. He said: “there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus **knew from the beginning** who they were that **believed not**, and who should betray him” (Jno. 6:64). Again, in verse 70 Jesus said: “Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil? He speak of Judas Iscariot the son of Simon: for he it was that should betray him, being one of the twelve” (Jno. 6:70-71).

From these words, we see that although Judas followed the Lord during his mortal ministry, (and witnessed the marvellous miracles that he performed – and indeed performed miracles himself, being the recipient of Holy Spirit power), he nevertheless believed not. Hence he was a devil, and was to become a betrayer.

John chapter 12 demonstrates the character of this man, following the anointing of the Lord by Mary:

“Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, which should betray him, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein” (Jno. 12:4-6).

It is clear that Judas’s actions were governed by self interest, and the love of money – which is a root of all kinds of evil (1 Tim, 6:10). Even when he was part of the company of disciples, he stole from the poor, having no regard for their benefit. Indeed, such an attitude was anticipated by the Psalmist who spoke of him:

“he remembered not to shew mercy, but persecuted the poor and needy man, that he might slay the broken in heart” (see context in Psalm 109).

Ultimately, the broken in heart whom he slew was the Master himself. After the anointing thus described, “Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, and said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. And from that time, he sought opportunity to betray him” (Mat. 26:14-16).

Notice that again, Judas’ motivation was of self-interest, having no regard for the poor, or the sufferings of the One he was to betray, but it was the love of money.

The betrayal by Judas was spoken of elsewhere in the Psalms. To pick two examples:

“... for it was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it: neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him: But it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide and mine acquaintance” (Psa. 55:12-13).

“Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me” (Psa. 41:9).

These principles emerge from the words of Messiah at the time of his betrayal:

“... Judas, one of the twelve came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people. Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he: hold him fast. And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, master, and kissed him. And Jesus said unto him, **Friend**, wherefore art thou come? Then came they, and laid hands on Jesus, and took him” (Mat. 26:47-50).

And again:

“... behold a multitude, and he that was called Judas, one of the twelve went before them, and drew near unto Jesus to kiss him. But Jesus said unto him, Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man **with a kiss?**” (Lu. 22:47-48).

Despite his knowledge of the character and actions of his betrayer, the Lord nevertheless address him as “Friend” – he was his own “familiar friend” as the Psalm has it. It is ironic that Judas betrayed his Lord and Master with a token of love and affection – a kiss. Hence was illustrated the Proverb: “faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful” (Prov. 27:6).

It would appear that Judas did have a conscience, even though for a while it was numb to the things which he did. Matthew chapter 27 records his regret for what he had done in securing Messiah’s death:

“Then Judas which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? See thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself” (Mat. 27:3-5).

But there is a sin unto death, which shall not be forgiven. Christ himself spoke of what would happen to the betrayer:

“the Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It had been good for that man if he had not been born” (Mat. 26:24).

Psalm 109 also speaks of Judas’ demise:

“as he loved cursing, so let it come unto him: as he delighted not in blessing, so let it be far from him. As he clothed himself with cursing as with his garment, so let it come into his bowels as water, and like oil into his bones. Let it be unto him as the garment which covereth him, and for a girdle wherewith he is girded continually” (Psa. 109:17-19).

And so the record in Acts shows the fulfilment of these words:

“Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out” (Acts 1:18).

Putting these testimonies together, it would appear that Judas sought relief through suicide, hanging himself by his girdle. However, the girdle broke, and he fell headlong and his bowels gushed out. Some would see a contradiction between the record of Acts 1, and Matthew 27, but there is none. We already saw that Judas stole from the collection bag for the poor: it would appear to be that he used this money to purchase the field (i.e. the reward of iniquity), where he fell and died. This is different to the money thrown back down at the feet of the Chief Priests and Elders, which they used to purchase the Potter’s field.

So it is that when we come to consider the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, we see a contrast with the death of Judas. Jesus died to save men from their sins: Judas died as a consequence of his sin.

SIMON PETER

The Apostle Paul gives the admonishment: “let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed, lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12). We have an example of this in Peter: he thought he would never deny his Master, but in the event, he fell. Luke chapter 22 records his confidence:

“... he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death. And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me” (Lu. 22:33-34).

The Lord who knew what was in man, both knew of Judas’s betrayal, and also Peter’s denial. But there was hope in Peter, who truly repented, hence the Master said: “I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren” (Lu. 22:32). Though he fell, nevertheless, yet ultimately his faith would not fail.

The record in Luke 22 records the circumstances of Peter’s denial. When the Lord was led into the high priest’s house, we read that:

“Peter followed afar off. And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them. But a certain maid beheld him as he sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him, and said, This man was also with him. And **he denied him**, saying, I know him not” (Lu. 22: see verses 54-60).

And the record in Matthew 26:58 describes how that he did so “to see the end”.

In 1 Peter 5:1 Peter introduces himself as “an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed”. He witnessed first-hand the sufferings of Christ, yet at that time, he denied association with him. By contrast, when we come to Acts 4, those to whom Peter and Johns preached “took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13). It was evident from both their words and actions, “that they had been with Jesus”, and Peter was indeed willing to suffer for Christ’s sake, having been “converted”.

Once the cock crew, we read of how:

“The Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out and wept bitterly” (Lu. 22:61-62).

There is an important distinction between the repentance of Peter, and that of Judas. Judas repented “in himself” – that is, he felt sorry for himself, with the knowledge of what he had done. But he did not truly repent, instead seeking a way out through suicide. Peter, however, sorrowed to true repentance. The two types of repentance are described by Paul in the context of those who repented because of his previous message:

“... now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. **For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation** not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death” (2 Cor. 7:8-10).

Peter had a “godly sorrow” over what he had done, but Judas felt sorry for himself: he had the sorrow that “worketh death”, rather than a genuine repentance to life.

In his prayer of John chapter 17, the Lord described how “while I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the Scripture might be fulfilled” (Jno. 17:12). Notice that here, “none of them” were lost, except Judas. Peter denied his Master, but was not lost, as he repented and lived the rest of his life in professing that which he previously denied – being with the Lord Jesus.

There is another point that is relevant here, in the context of the memorial meeting. In Matthew 26, we read:

“... and as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me. And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, **Lord, is it I?** (Mat. 26:22).

Notice, their investigation turned inward – “is it I?”, not is it one of the others? And Paul, who received special instruction from the Master concerning the Breaking of Bread exhorts us:

“wherefore, whosoever shall eat of this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the blood and body of the Lord. But let a man so examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body” (1 Cor. 11:27-29).

As we come then, to memorialise the sacrifice of the Master in partaking of the bread and wine, we must look inwardly, and consider our own standing before the Lord. Both Judas and Peter failed – yet only one was lost. Peter, despite his failing, lived the rest of his life in his Lord’s service – and will therefore receive the reward given to those who sow to the spirit, and not to the flesh (See Gal. 6:7-8). Judas, however, was a “lost” cause, who betrayed the Only Begotten Son of God – to his own destruction.

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