

**Peace in the Valley:
“Valley of Betrayal”**

Luke 22:47-52

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When it comes to naming our children, parents try to do the best we can. We search high and low for just the word that will follow our sons and daughters for a life- time. Sometimes we turn to the Bible. James and John, Peter and Andrew, Mary and Martha are all names quite common in our time. But, one Biblical name you never hear used is the name of Jesus’ most infamous disciple – Judas. In Germany, it is against the law to name your child Judas. In America, it is against your better judgment.

Yet, Judas Iscariot was one of the twelve disciples whom Jesus made apostles. He was the treasurer of the group and obviously had the trust of his Lord. Yet he betrays the Son of Man with a kiss – an ultimate sign of friendship. Come; let us consider this deep, dark valley of betrayal.

THE PLOT: WHAT MADE HIM DO IT? Scholars have asked that question for centuries.

For John, the apostle, the answer is simple. Greed made him do it. For John, Judas was a thief, a money-grabber, and a back stabber. He simply decided to take the cash and let the credit go. One day Martha anoints Jesus’ feet with expensive perfume and Judas protests. “Why wasn’t this perfume sold and the money given to the poor?” After all, it was worth a year’s wages. But John sees through the plot and comments: *“He did not say this because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, as a keeper of the money bag, he helped himself to what was put in it.”*

Never be too quick to dismiss the deadly sin of greed which lurks in the shadows of the best of us. Greed causes us to betray ourselves and those we love. It does great harm.

When Enron executives sat quietly in their offices and plundered the life savings of millions of people, greed is the motive. When honest sales people pad their expense accounts using the excuse that everybody else is doing it; greed is the motive. Before long we become what we do not perceive ourselves to be a thief, a robber, a rogue, a compartmentalized person who lives a double life. Maybe he did it for the money – about \$10,000 in today’s dollars.

Some think Judas as a violent nationalist, a misguided zealot and therefore, not interested in the money at all. He attached himself to Jesus because Jesus was a leader. Jesus could make a dream come true. For Judas the dream was the overthrow of the Roman government, but Jesus was slow to act. So Judas decides to force his hand. Surely, when his life is on the line, he will rise up in self-defense, rally the people and cause a riot which could lead to a change in government. So Judas betrays Jesus in a twisted effort to bring about change, which ought to be a lesson to all of us who feel compelled to take matters in our own hands. Shakespeare said it well, "Trying to better we oft mar what is well."

In the spring of 2006, the National Geographic Society did a documentary of the Gospel of Judas, a work dating back to the second century. They showed it on the Easter holiday for a lot more than thirty pieces of silver.

In the gospel of Judas, Judas is a hero. He and Jesus are best friends. Together they develop this plot for Judas to hand Jesus over to the Pharisees and the Romans so that the Son of Man can fulfill his mission on Earth and earn his right to heaven. It is a twisted piece of Gnostic heresy which threatened the early church and manages to be resurrected from generation to generation. In this version Judas is the enlightened one, while the rest of the disciples wander in the dark. Nowhere in the Bible is Judas cast as a hero. And the words of Jesus keep ringing in our ears. Are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?

THE PROBLEM: *"When Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and elders. 'I have sinned,' he said, 'for I have betrayed innocent blood.'"*

In one searing moment Judas saw how tragically far wrong his carefully thought-out plan had gone. He had betrayed his Lord.

To betray is to break a trust between two or more people. Trust is no easy thing to establish and to break a trust is to thrust a knife into the heart of another. Betrayal is a wound to the soul. When married couples promise to love, honor, and cherish each other as long as they both shall live and then break that agreement in some selfish fling of emotion, souls are wounded.

When a friend knowingly breaks a confidence that causes hurt, that is betrayal and souls are wounded. When a boss or organization pretends to be honest and fair while manipulating employees to exploit their talents, souls are wounded. When a colleague pledges their political support, then works against you behind your back, souls are wounded.

Mohammad says there are three signs of a hypocrite. When he speaks, he lies; when he makes a promise, he breaks it; and when he is trusted, he betrays his trust.

Can betrayal be overcome? Can trust be rebuilt? Yes, if the facts are faced. Judas does own his guilt, and take responsibility for his actions. He neither excuses nor explains his actions. He simply says, *"I have sinned."* *"I have betrayed innocent blood."* Do we have that kind of courage? Or, do we try to explain the pain by blaming others? Honesty takes responsibility.

Can betrayal be overcome? Yes, if the betrayed person is encountered. Herein lies the problem for Judas. He is confessing to chief priests. You would think they could receive his confession and grant him absolution, but they are as guilty as Judas. That's why Judas needed to go straight to His Lord.

King David offers a good example when he prays *"For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight."* Recovery from betrayal is no time to be beating around the bush.

Can betrayal be overcome? Yes, if trustworthy behavior follows. Judas never gets a chance to prove himself. Loss of hope leads him to despair and solves nothing in the scheme of things. People who prove trustworthy in small things can be eventually trusted in larger things.

THE PARADOX: So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself. He went away and hanged himself! Seven hundred sixty-five thousand Americans attempt suicide each year. About thirty-two thousand of them succeeded. Suicide is the eighth leading cause of death in the U.S. It ranks third among persons aged fifteen to twenty-four. The rise of euthanasia, the prevalence of violence in movies and video games, the increase of teenagers walking into schools and opening fire, makes some people conclude that we live in a "death obsessed" culture.

Your life is not your right to take. Your life is a sacred trust from God. When it comes to life, you are not free to do as you please; you are not God. Suicide is an irreversible act of selfishness that causes great pain and sorrow to anyone who cares for you. If you are contemplating suicide, get some help, until you find some hope to carry on. Suicide is a long-term solution to a short-term problem.

What becomes of Judas? Is there any hope for Judas? God knows. Catholics were wrong in declaring suicide an unpardonable sin and until 1983, excluding such persons from a catholic burial. Suicide often happens, not as a death wish, but a desperate search for relief from physical or mental anguish. It may be a sign of mental illness.

God is merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. There is an old story that after his death, Judas wandered the universe looking for somewhere to rest his weary soul. Hell wouldn't take him. Earth wouldn't have him. Judas could find no resting place in all creation. At last, in a nameless region of dark and cold, the soul of Judas

spotted a lighted hall. Sounds of music and laughter came from behind the door. Judas opens the door and finds behind it a supper table set for thirteen. The guests were all seated as the host rises to embrace Judas with a kiss. "We have waited a long time for you to come. Let the feast begin," said the host. And at last, Judas was home.

Even in the deep, dark valley of betrayal, there laid the possibility of recovery and restoration. Maybe somebody here can hear the host say to you, "We've been waiting a long time; let the feast begin. Welcome home." May there be peace in the valley for you!

Amen.