

Jesus Suffered Betrayal

Matthew 26:46-56
Lent Evening III, March 15, 2015

Beloved of the Lord.....We know from the Scriptures that the Lord Jesus was “touched with the feelings of our infirmities”. Likewise we know that as True Man, Jesus had the feelings and emotions like all other men, except Jesus was without sin. The Bible teaches Jesus slept, hungered, thirst, wept, suffered, and died. Though Jesus is God, since there is a communion of natures, as True Man Jesus could feel the pain of betrayal, and it must have hurt Him dearly. Christ speaks of this betrayal in Psalm 41:9, “Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me.”

While we to some extent expect the enmity of the world around us, we do hold our fellow Christians and friends to a higher standard. Moreover, when someone close to us betrays us, it is a very deep wound which we often have trouble forgiving. Adultery is betrayal, and many Christian spouses have experienced such betrayal of heart. Likewise there is the betrayal of a fallen Christian, namely the grief we feel when a close believer is seduced by sin so that they despise Christ in their heart. That is betrayal too, and the disciples felt that that night when they saw Judas on the side of the soldiers. Most of us have been betrayed by someone in the past, but none of us were betrayed like Jesus. Everyone forsook Jesus that night, even His own disciples. And finally on the cross, God the Father forsook God the Son. Our sins were there, and Jesus was more alone and forsaken far more than we could possibly understand.

Though Jesus was most shamefully betrayed by Judas, it is a wonder to hear Jesus calling Judas “Friend” in the Garden of Gethsemane. As deeply as Judas had descended into Satan’s snare, Jesus was still reaching out to him even at the time of His very betrayal, and Judas still could have been saved if only He asked Jesus to forgive. So today let us remember, though we ourselves betray Christ daily by sins of weakness and others, there is yet forgiveness for all our sins by His holy and precious blood. Let us then be faithful to Him and not deny Him or run away, even though our sins be great. Jesus sinners doth receive, and Jesus is a Friend of sinners, for “God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

I. “Mine own familiar friend”. Speaking now particularly of the betrayal of Judas, this betrayal began much earlier than the Garden, for Luke 22 tells us that as the Passover drew nigh, “Then entered Satan into Judas surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve. And he went his way, and communed with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray him unto them. And they were glad, and covenanted to give him money.” Judas thus made a very conscious choice to betray Christ because he loved the money. Also this probably took some time. Since Judas was the keeper of the bag, he began to

think of that church money as his own, and he may have stolen a little here and there, thinking it wouldn't hurt anyone. Watch out then when you call your pet sins "little sins" which cannot harm anyone. The little sins harm your soul just as much as the big sins, and "at the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder." That's what happened to Judas. Surely he reasoned, the Jews would only put Jesus in jail for a time, or perhaps rough him up a little. Judas hardly believed they would murder Jesus. But once he learned the fate of Christ his little sins suddenly became a master and lord over him. He saw the blood on his hands and he was thrown into despair and then suicide. We are foolish when we consider any of our sins little, or harmless, or small. Even the smallest sin in our sight is the greatest offense in God's sight, and one sin merits all the torments of hell, just as much as ten or twenty sins, yet we have committed thousands, even hundreds of thousands, yet "the Lord hath laid on Jesus the iniquity of us all" and "by His stripes we are healed." Don't let the devil rob you of Christ, or even enter in, by letting sin take control of your life. We must do as Jesus said that night in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Regarding temptation and the devil, Luther therefore writes, "As long as we live in the flesh and have the devil about us, no one can escape temptations and incitements to sin. It cannot be otherwise. We are bound to suffer temptations, in fact, to be deeply involved in them. But our prayer is that we do not fall into them and be entirely overwhelmed by them. There is, then, a great difference between feeling temptation and yielding to it, saying yes to it. We must all experience temptation, though not to the same degree; some people have more and stronger temptations than others."

Those earlier temptations which God allowed Judas, when Judas had faith, were not too powerful for Judas because God never gives us more than we can bear. By the help of the Spirit Judas could have well resisted the temptation to covet and steal, and then later betray Christ. But Judas did no such thing. Yet even in the Garden when the betrayal took place, Jesus was still working for the salvation of fallen Judas. When Jesus then is kissed by Judas, notice how the door to repentance and faith is still open. Jesus says "Friend, betrayest thou me with a kiss." This wasn't a cruel jab as many would suppose, but Jesus meant that word "Friend" in all truth. And had Judas confessed his sins there, Jesus would happily say "Neither do I condemn thee, go and sin no more." Also let it be said just because the Scriptures foretold this betrayal, Judas didn't have to betray Christ, nor was he forced to or doomed to by God. Judas did have a choice. But since Judas had allowed himself to be ruled by the love of money and sin, and since He didn't repent and take his sins to Jesus in faith as Jesus had taught him to do, the death and suicide and damnation of Judas was his fault and not God's, because "Christ died for all" and "God would have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth." We should not feel sorry for Judas, for he knew what he was doing, but we should use the lesson of Judas so that we beware of the power of sin and the devil's temptations. We also remember Jesus was a Friend of Sinners, even this sinner, unto the end. So likewise "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."

II. The Betrayal of His Disciples. Turning our attention now to the disciples, they likewise betrayed Christ that night, but they did not fall away as Judas. Their flight into the night when they forsook Christ was not a conscious and willful sin as Judas, but it was a shameful sin of weakness. But if we are to understand all this correctly, we must first hear of the great confidence of the disciples, that they would never do such a thing. In Matthew 26:35, we remember Peter said to Jesus, "Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples." Yet when that critical moment came to confess Christ to the end, what does our text this evening say? After the incident with Peter and the sword the Bible says, "Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled."

Why did this happen? It happened because their confidence was in their own strength and power to resist temptation. Self-confidence is the opposite of faith. Self-confidence is the Old Adam within us. But the New Man, namely a proper faith speaks this way regarding temptation: Though I have no strength in me to resist sin at all, and I am powerless against the devil on my own, Christ by His blood has redeemed me from my sins and given me His Spirit. By His grace therefore, by faith in Him and not myself, God will surely help, aide, and deliver me through each and every temptation, and since I have prayed "Lead me not into temptation but deliver me from evil", so He will do as He has promised. God is faithful, who will not suffer me to be tempted above that I am able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that I may be able to bear it."

Whenever we see the warning of Christ then to His disciples, "Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation", we must remember not to put our confidence in our own strength, but we trust and believe GOD ALONE is our strength, our Rock, our Fortress or Shield who will never fail. But it is also true, because we are such vain and proud creatures, God sometimes withdraws Himself or pulls back a little that we might feel how weak we really are. In this way our pride is broken and we become humble once again, or at least a bit humbler. To put it another way, sometimes we need to see just how weak and poor and miserable sinners we really are. I'm sure those disciples never forgot how they abandoned Jesus that night, but I doubt they ever did it again. The lesson was learned. So let us learn our lesson tonight, "Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation."

But there another lesson here far more precious to cherish. When Jesus had said to the soldiers the second time, whom seek ye, and "they said, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered, I have told you that I am he: if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way That the saying might be fulfilled, which he spake, Of them which thou gavest me have I lost none." Jn. 18 By these words "Let these go their way" Jesus provided His disciples "a letter of safe conduct which the enemies are compelled to respect. What would have become of the poor disciples, if they also had been seized at this time and led to their death? How strong a Lord Jesus, and how true! He lays down his life of himself, in order that we may live; and he cares for us everywhere in the most hopeless circumstances, that he may lose none of them which the Father gave him. Keep this in your heart, and call it

to mind when you are being tempted. His power and love and fidelity are with you to save you. Have faith in him.” (Book of Family Prayer, by N.J. Laache pg 165, 1902)

In conclusion dear children of your Heavenly Father, understand in all of your trials and temptations, Jesus still works the same way with you. In His tender mercies, because you are weak, He keeps thousands of temptations away from you which would be too strong. Likewise those temptations He allows, are not too great to bear. These light afflictions work a far greater weight of glory. For even now those disciples who betrayed and forsook Christ that night, they are all in heaven now by the tender mercies of God our Father. So you will be if you faint not but endure to the end. Remember your Baptism. Remember His body and blood given and shed for you. Let God’s faithfulness be your strength in every temptation, and do not forsake Him knowing He will never forsake you. For “He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name....Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.” Amen.