

The Kiss

Luke 22:47-53

Suddenly, the disciples were shocked wide awake. Far off across the bridge, they heard a tramp of feet and a clatter of armor coming down the hill. And through the limbs of the old olive trees, they could see torches winking in the darkness.

They scrambled to their feet. Their hearts in their throats, they stood wide eyed, stunned like deer caught in headlights.

For three years, teaching had been Jesus' primary purpose. Walking dusty down Galilean footpaths and through crowded Capernaum markets, He spent His time training these men.

But as soldiers clattered down the hill and over the bridge, the time for teaching was over. It was time to begin the great eternal task He had come all the way from Heaven to fulfill. Time to stand the whirlwind of God's wrath. Time to die.

Evil always begins with an impulse and an idea, with a desire and a design. That is the way it was with Judas.

He was a careful, calculating man. So the idea to turn the Master over to the bearded old priests who ruled the temple came slowly. Walking footpaths in Galilee and watching orange coals crumble in campfires, he hatched a plan.

He thought it all out, searching his mind for loopholes and lapses in his strategy. And when Passover came, all the pieces finally fell in place.

He knew the ruling Jews' great fear was a popular uprising. So the only time to capture the Man many people called Christ was at night when the crowds were all asleep.

And Judas knew the perfect place to do it.

Deception

The old priests were thrilled to find a turncoat who knew the Carpenter so well. But they should not have been. Everything Judas did that night proves that, even after three years at the Savior's side, he really did not know Jesus at all.

For one thing, the priests brought soldiers and policemen. And even if Judas did not urge them to do so, he was glad to lead them.

Judas, one of the twelve, came up accompanied by a crowd with swords and clubs, who were from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. Mark 14:43

An officer and his cohort of Roman soldiers were assigned to the chief priests. This night they were the arresting party. And they were well armed.

Judas knew what he would do if he was in Jesus' place. He would not be taken without a fight. So soldiers carried close combat swords. And temple policemen were armed with riot clubs.

Of course, there was no real need for swords and clubs, for policemen and soldiers. Judas should have known the Redeemer would not resist.

Had it been so long since the sparkling spring day when the Savior sat on the green grass of a hillside overlooking the blue waters of Gennesaret and taught?

...love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; Luke 6:27-29

Perhaps Judas did not remember what the Redeemer said that day. More likely, he simply

did not believe the Man he followed. After all, religious teaching is one thing. Reality is quite another.

But the Master meant every word He said. Each moment of each day, He lived by the truths He taught. And He demands that those who follow Him do the same.

Judas also doubted Christ's courage. He thought Jesus might try to hide Himself among His followers. So he prearranged a sign with the priests.

Now he who was betraying Him had given them a signal, saying, "Whomever I kiss, He is the one; seize Him and lead Him away under guard." Mark 14:44

Today, close friends shake hands when they meet. But then men exchanged a formal kiss on the cheek. So, just in case the soldiers did not know which man was Jesus, Judas prearranged to personally identify Him with a kiss.

...and he approached Jesus to kiss Him. But Jesus said to him, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?" Verses 47-48

It is not at all surprising that Judas did not drop his mask of faithfulness and friendship when he stood at the head of armed soldiers. He had postured and pretended piety so long, he was smug and sure the Savior did not suspect how false and fake his friendship really was.

The Greek word for Judas' kiss describes a fervent, heartfelt expression of love. It was used of the weeping woman who washed Jesus' feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. And our Lord used it to describe the kiss the prodigal's father gave his returning son.

But Judas' kiss was an empty imitation of that intense love. Even with a squad of soldiers spiked with drawn swords behind him, he believed he could deceive Jesus. He had feigned faithfulness and pretended piety so long, he was convinced that Christ could still be fooled by false praise and pretended friendship.

But Jesus was never fooled by Judas' play acting. From the very beginning the Master knew Judas' heart was full of sin and self. He always knew the man from Kerioth was a wolf wearing sheep's clothing. And early on, the Savior said so.

Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil? John 6:70

We must never make Judas' mistake. Our Lord is never fooled by piety and praise that does not come from a heart overflowing with love for Him. Nothing is quite so disgusting to our Savior as praise that is all pretense. He takes no pleasure in those who call Him Savior, Lord, and Master yet do not love Him enough to obey Him from the heart.

But Judas was more than a lying enemy. He was also a fool. He believed he could deceive the omniscient God who reads the hearts of men like a preschool primer. And we are also fools if we think we can please God with sweet hymns, pious prayers, and loud praise when we neither love nor trust Him.

The truth is, pretended praise and hollow worship are echoes of an empty heart. They are positive proof that we do not really know Jesus at all. If we did, we could not help but love Him.

We would know from sweet experience that He sticks closer than a brother. And like a loving father, He overflows with kindness and compassion for those who trust Him.

Just as a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him. Psalm 103:13

If we really have tasted our Lord's love, we cannot help but know how good He is to those who lay their lives in His hands.

O taste and see that the Lord is good; how blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him! Psalm 34:8-9

Judas' problem was that he never for a single moment trusted Jesus. So he had never tasted God's goodness.

And if our praise is as empty as his, we have not, either.

Darkness

In the end, Judas' kiss was unnecessary. Jesus had no intention of hiding among His followers. Christ did not even wait for the soldiers to ask. He openly identified Himself.

Jesus, knowing all the things that were coming upon Him, went forth and said to them, "Whom do you seek?" They answered Him, "Jesus the Nazarene." He said to them, "I am He." John 18:4-5

That was all the ruling Jews needed. They smiled and nodded to the commanding officer. And the soldiers seized the Savior.

They laid hands on Him and seized Him. Verse 46

While the Redeemer did not resist, He did aim a pointed question at the old priests. He forced them to face themselves and the foolish fears that filled them.

Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders who had come against Him, "Have you come out with swords and clubs as you would against a robber?" While I was with you daily in the temple, you did not lay hands on Me; Verses 52-53

Rebels against Roman rule financed their insurrection with armed robbery. So they had to be taken by force at night while they were sleeping. But Jesus was no zealot. They could have taken Him anytime they wanted to.

They did not even have to worry about a riot among the Passover pilgrims that crowded the city. The Redeemer arrived at temple long before they did. And for two full weeks, He stood in the shadows of the forest of pillars on Solomon's porch and taught.

Temple police could have easily marched out onto the temple courtyard and taken Him anytime they wanted to. But they did not. And the reason the ruling Jews did not arrest Jesus in broad daylight was simple. They preferred the darkness.

...this hour and the power of darkness are yours. Verse 53

Darkness ruled the hearts of the old priests. That is why they chose to act in the dead of night. The prince of darkness himself reigned over those old priests. So they hated both the light of day and the Light of the World.

...everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. John 3:20

Just like their evil master, those old priests preferred darkness and secrecy. After all, God is the one who stands for truth and full disclosure in the light of day.

The old priests carried out their raid in darkness while Jerusalem slept out of fear, plain and simple. Sure, there were only a few worshipers when Jesus taught on the temple courtyards during those days before the feast.

But the priests still feared what they might do. Yes, it was unreasonable and illogical to fear so few. But living in the darkness of sin always breathes fear into the hearts of men.

The wicked flee when no one is pursuing, but the righteous are bold as a lion. Proverbs 28:1

Strengthened by the power of God's Spirit and armed with the wisdom of His Word, those who trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord can afford to be bold. They live in the light of God's love. And that always creates courage in the hearts of men.

Still, the ruling Jews believed they had good reason to fear how the people might react if they dragged the Teacher away in chains on the temple courtyard while everyone was watching. They owed their powerful positions to Roman rulers.

And Rome harbored an abiding hatred for popular uprisings. So the old priests crept around

in the darkness. A riot might cost them their rich robes and spacious villas. And fear of punishment is another indication a man has never known God's perfect love.

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. 1 John 4:18

The rulers of the temple wore masks of pride and arrogance. But inside they were filled with fear of what powerful men might do to them. That is a result of indulging a dark heart.

The old priests looked upon Judas with unbridled contempt. But they were just as surrounded and saturated with the devil's darkness as he was.

Their days were filled with prayers and rituals. But their fear of men proves God was not really their loving Helper. He was their righteous Judge.

The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me. Hebrews 13:6 (KJV)

Only the blood of Jesus can chase the darkness from our lives. And we can only live in the light of God's love by choosing to trust in Christ. If we do not, we are doomed to live and die in darkness.

Dependence

One wild chaotic moment, confusion erupted in the garden. The soldiers seized the Savior. Then one disciple asked for permission to make a fight of it. But he did not wait for an answer

When those who were around Him saw what was going to happen, they said, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" And one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. Verse 49-50

John identified Peter as the disciple who swung a sword in the garden that night. Actually, Peter tried to split the man's skull. But the high priest's servant was quick enough to dodge the blow. So he only lost an ear.

In our eyes, Peter showed great courage. But bravery does not reside in reflexes or adrenaline. Real courage is shown when we dare to trust ourselves completely to God, regardless of what that might mean. And Jesus was quick to correct Peter.

So Jesus said to Peter, "Put the sword into the sheath; the cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?" John 18:11

Peter acted out of instinct and emotion, not courage. Christ was the model of courage, trusting Himself to His Father's perfect will.

When Peter stepped forward to defend the Lord he loved, he did not act out of faith, either. The Master might have looked helpless surrounded by soldiers. But He was still Lord of the universe. And God never needs to be defended by mere men.

...do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels? Matthew 26:53

If we believe everything is up to us rather than God, our faith is just as false as Judas' kiss. God does not need people to defend His honor. We must never forget that nothing in all the world depends upon us. Our God has need of nothing, surely not the frantic, faithless efforts of weak and wayward men like us.

Neither was Peter acting in love. Christ commanded us to do good to those who oppose us, not wage war against them. That is why He healed the ear of a man who came to arrest Him.

But Jesus answered and said, "Stop! No more of this." And He touched his ear and healed him. Verse 51

Even in the worst of circumstances we are to have the courage to trust God's will, the faith to submit to His sovereignty, and the love to obey Him. If we do not, we are nothing at all like

Jesus.

We are like Judas.