

Sam Storms
Bridgeway Church

Sermon Summary #45

The Kiss of Betrayal **Matthew 26:47-56; 27:1-10** **Mark 14:43-52; John 18:4-9**

The title for today's message is deliberately provocative. By juxtaposing two words that are seemingly opposite, if not mutually exclusive, my aim is to provoke in all of us a sense of unnaturalness and discomfort. In other words, I want us all to be bothered not simply the title of the message but especially by its content. I know that you come here week after week expecting to be encouraged and strengthened in your faith, and I think that will happen again today. But I want to be honest with you in saying that today's text and message will probably do more to agitate and upset you than anything else.

The Kiss of Betrayal . . . Everyone knows that a kiss is an expression of affection and intimacy. Betrayal, on the other hand, is an act of treachery and deceit. A "kiss of betrayal", therefore, is a contradiction in terms. It's like saying that someone had a "smile of hatred" or they "laughed with sorrow." To speak of a kiss of betrayal is to say that what ought to be a token of friendship has become an instrument of treason.

If you've been paying attention these past few weeks you should by now be comfortable with this sort of paradox during Passion Week. That Jesus predicted his own arrest and crucifixion is paradoxical. That Mary should have anointed him with expensive perfume in preparation for his burial also strikes us as odd. That Jesus, the Son of God, should be found in Gethsemane groveling on the ground in prayer is perhaps the greatest paradox of all. That his disciples are told that they will soon abandon him in his hour of need strikes us as bizarre. But now, yet again, we are confronted with something that is hard to swallow: Judas Iscariot, one of our Lord's closest friends, betrays the priceless Son of God for 30 pieces of silver. The irony is overwhelming. Jesus, whose "weightiness" and "worth" are beyond calculation, is auctioned off for a mere pittance, the price typically asked in exchange for a common slave!

The payment (Mt. 26:15; Mk. 14:10-11) was probably given to Judas for information as to where Jesus could be arrested in a quiet setting with little chance for crowd unrest. It is possible that he first led this military and religious detachment to the upper room itself, thinking that Jesus and the disciples would still be there. Upon discovering that they had departed, Judas escorted the crowd to Gethsemane. We read in John 18:1-2 that it was a place to which Jesus and the disciples frequently went.

Two things need to be said about v. 47. (1) First, Judas, is described as "one of the twelve." Matthew, Mark, and Luke all refer to Judas in this way, most likely to heighten the enormity of his crime. It was not that Judas was "one of the crowd," or "one of the Pharisees," or "one of the Romans" or "one of the arresting party." He was *one of the twelve*, one of those with whom Jesus was most intimately associated and to whom he had wholly entrusted himself. John puts it yet another way: "And Judas also who was betraying him, was standing *with them*," that is, he was standing with the arresting party, not with the disciples.

(2) The second thing to note is that they came after Jesus "with swords and clubs" (v. 47). This may be in anticipation of Peter's taking up a sword and whacking off the ear of the high priest's servant. In any case, it's important for us to note that the purpose of God and the advance and expansion of his kingdom can neither be thwarted by physical violence and man-made weapons nor can it be aided and supported by such. Tragically, history is littered with stories of war and physical violence all of which were undertaken in the belief that either Christianity can be crushed and wiped from the face of the earth or, conversely, that it can be assisted and promoted by such. Both are wrong!

Why the "kiss"? Aside from the fact that it was customary for a disciple to greet a Rabbi with a kiss, they probably agreed on this sign for three reasons: (1) it was dark; (2) most of these would probably not have known what Jesus looked like; (3) they feared losing him in the turmoil that might transpire.

"Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy" (Prov. 27:6).

The words translated ("do what you came to do") may be taken in one of two ways. (1) If it is a command to Judas, then we see Jesus again manifesting that poise and confident sovereignty that was so conspicuous before Gethsemane (cf. John 13:27). Although it may seem to some that the events of this final week are careening out of control like a runaway car down a steep incline, Jesus is ever the sovereign one, in complete control, exercising supreme authority over every event. (2) There is also the possibility that this is a question ("why have you come?"). If so, it elicits no information but "administers a rebuke steeped in the irony of professed ignorance that knows very well why Judas has come" (Carson, 547).

It is probably here, in the middle of v. 50, immediately after Jesus made this statement but before they actually laid hands on him and arrested him, that we should place the events of **John 18:4-9**. So let's take a brief look at that passage.

Note carefully how Jesus identifies himself in John 18:6,8 - "***I am He***" (*lit.*, "***I am***"). Was Jesus simply saying, "I am Jesus the Nazarene whom you seek"? Surely there is more involved, for it is ludicrous to think that an entire Roman cohort (600 men), along with officers from the chief priests and Pharisees wielding clubs and swords, are going to keel over backwards like so many bowling pins at the sound of two words uttered by one unarmed Galilean carpenter!

This declaration may well be like that in **John 8:58** (cf. Ex. 3:14). Thus Jesus is identifying himself as the self-existent, uncreated, eternal Yahweh of Israel now incarnate in human flesh (cf. Dt. 32:39; Isa. 41:4; 43:10-13). On the other hand, would the Roman soldiers have understood this declaration (the religious leaders would have)? It seems that more than the simple declaration "I am" is needed to account for their reaction.

Perhaps something akin to the revelation of his glory on the Mt. of Transfiguration occurred. The arresting party had come prepared for many possibilities (compromise, fear, resistance, evasion, lies, etc.), but what they heard and saw was altogether a shock:

"It was as if He had pulled the curtain of the incarnate deity open for a moment, and the essential glory of God shone through, the light to which no man can approach. An overwhelming impression of His majesty gripped them, and they fell flat like reeds before the wind. The 'eyes as a flame of fire' were too much for them, for a little bit of the 'wrath of the Lamb' had smitten them" (S. L. Johnson).

In a manner of speaking, his human flesh popped a leak! For only a short moment, the dam of his humanity was opened to let shine forth the floodwaters of his divine majesty. And they collapsed in his presence! It is almost as if Jesus is toying with them, in effect saying, the only reason you are about to lay hands on me and take me away is because I'm allowing you to do so.

In John 18:8 he asks that they "let these men go." Again, Jesus' immediate and ultimate concern in the midst of his affliction is the safety and security of his people! The amazing thing is that he knows their departure is the last he will see of them until after the resurrection. In other words, he knows that they will not simply leave, they will abandon him. Yet he cares for them and is concerned for their welfare and safety.

(We now return to Mt. 26:50 . . .)

The fact that they "seized him" is striking when seen in the light of earlier pronouncements concerning their utter inability to lay hands on him. See Luke 4:16-30 (esp. vv. 29-30); John 7:30; 10:39. The reason for this change is found in the statements of Jesus concerning his "hour" (Mt. 26:45). See John 2:4; 7:6,8,30; 8:20; and compare them with Mt. 26:45 and John 17:1. It wasn't until the divinely appointed moment, in fulfillment of the purpose for his coming, that anyone was permitted to lay hands on him. There would be no premature death here!

Only in John's gospel are we told that the disciple who picked up the sword was Peter. And only in John are we told that the poor fellow who lost his ear was named *Malchus*. And it is only in Luke's gospel that we are told that Jesus healed him of the wound (Luke, being a doctor, understandably highlighted that point!). In all likelihood, Peter was aiming for his head and simply missed!

But why did Peter do this? Maybe he gained momentary courage after watching the soldiers collapse in fear when Jesus spoke. Maybe he was still determined to prove that he was sincere when he said "I will never fall

away from you! I will die for you if necessary” (Mt. 26:33,35)! Maybe he was still convinced that the Messiah should never die (Mt. 16:22). Or perhaps he thought this was the moment that his loyalty was going to be put to the test; after all, Jesus had told him he would soon deny him three times. Whatever motivated him, we should remember that according to Luke 22:49 all of the disciples were asking Jesus if they should take up swords to defend him. Peter just happened to be quicker on the draw than the others!

Some have taken Jesus’ words in vv. 52-54 as an endorsement of complete pacifism. Others point out that Jesus didn’t tell Peter to throw away his sword but to put it back in its place. And if wielding a sword was always and everywhere wrong, why did Jesus permit his disciples to carry one in the first place? The fact is, this has nothing to do with the issue of pacifism.

Our Lord’s point is simply that what Peter and the others were tempted to do by force is unnecessary. If Jesus needed protection, he had at his disposal “more than twelve legions of angels” (v. 53) to do the job. A legion = 6,000! Perhaps he mentioned “twelve” legions to indicate that there would be one for himself and one for each of his remaining eleven disciples.

But even more important, as vv. 54 and 56 make clear, Peter’s action failed to realize that the arrest and eventual crucifixion of Jesus was absolutely necessary in order that Scripture might be fulfilled. Jesus had already submitted to the Father’s will. The struggle in Gethsemane is over. Jesus no longer prays that, if possible, he might be delivered from drinking the cup. He knows it is his Father’s will. He knows that the Scriptures have prophesied that it be so.

Thus Peter was not only guilty of rash and immature behavior but also of biblical and theological ignorance!

“Then all the disciples left him and fled” (v. 56). Two observations:

(1) I think their cowardice and panic can be attributed to at least two factors: first, their lack of preparation through prayer; and second, and even more decisive, their failure to reckon with the authority of God’s Word. Scripture had prophesied Messiah’s death. Scripture must be fulfilled. These men had allowed their emotions and fears to trump God’s Word. If they had only reckoned with the purpose of God as found in his Word, they would not have reacted with such fear and abandoned Jesus.

(2) Before we too quickly criticize the disciples, perhaps we should recall the many occasions when we have run from any association with Jesus: embarrassment, ridicule, fear of what it will cost us financially, relationally, socially . . .

We must now leap forward to Matthew 27. It’s important to understand that much happens between the time of our Lord’s betrayal by Judas and arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane and the events that we now read in Matthew 27, the two most important of which are that Jesus appears before Caiaphas the high priest and Peter, in fulfillment of Jesus’ prediction, denies him three times. With that in mind, we come to Matthew 27.

On reading this, it’s hard not to compare and contrast Peter and Judas Iscariot.

- Both are disciples of Jesus, personally chosen by him to be two of the twelve.
- Both were given positions of power and responsibility: Peter is the leader and spokesman for the twelve while Judas was the treasurer, who was entrusted with overseeing the money necessary to support them in ministry.
- Both men were told by Jesus that they would abandon and take offense at him.
- Both played prominent roles in the arrest of Jesus (as we have just seen).
- Both fail Jesus, just as predicted.
- Both are stricken with grief and remorse over what they did.
- Both, in manner of speaking, “repent”.

But it is here where the similarities end and the one major difference comes to prominence. The remorse of Peter was genuine, heart-felt, and led to authentic repentance and eventual restoration. The remorse of Judas was self-serving and resulted in despair and guilt and death. Whatever similarities they shared, one thing set them apart from each other: Peter was a man who had been born again by the Spirit. Judas, on the other hand, was

unregenerate, and whose outward profession of faith was not matched by an inward heart that truly loved the Lord.

We don't really know that much about Judas Iscariot. The name "Iscariot" most likely indicates that he was a native of Karioth, located south of Judea. We first hear of him in Luke 6:12-16 where he is chosen by Jesus to be one of the twelve. Why did Judas accept this call?

Some say Judas was a Jewish patriot who believed from the beginning that Jesus was an enemy of Israel and thus betrayed him in the interests of both God and country. There is no evidence to support this theory.

Others say Judas saw himself as a loyal and devoted servant of Jesus who deliberately assumed the role of traitor thinking that by doing so he might force Jesus to manifest his miraculous powers and bring the kingdom of God to earth in triumph over Rome.

Then there is the theory that Judas truly believed Jesus to be the Messiah but that he grew increasingly frustrated with our Lord's refusal to promote himself publicly; perhaps disillusionment with the direction that Jesus' ministry was going, combined with greed, and no doubt the influence of Satan himself, all contributed to his decision. In the final analysis, we may never know this side of heaven what led him to betray our Lord.

Matthew alone, among the four gospel writers, includes the story of Judas's change of mind and eventual suicide in 27:3-10.

Judas appears to "repent" (v. 3) and even "confesses" his sin (v. 4) in having betrayed Jesus for money. But clearly this was not a godly repentance awakened by a genuine conviction for having sinned against God.

Non-Christian people experience sorrow and remorse for their actions all the time. It may be that they feel psychological discomfort from having violated their conscience. It may be that they grieve over the painful social consequences that their behavior has caused. They may experience embarrassment that comes from being exposed to others. But self is still at the center of their souls. Their grief is the fruit of self-pity. They aren't experiencing emotional and spiritual pain because they recognize that their sin was against God and was an offense to the beauty and glory of God and his moral will. And most important of all, their grief and remorse isn't joined with faith.

Judas may well have been smitten with genuine regret and remorse for having betrayed someone that he knows was innocent. He may well have come to realize that greed and fear and self-protection were at the heart of his decision. But it is ultimately to no avail if he doesn't then turn in faith and submit to Jesus as the Lord of his life.

Note well that although Judas made an effort to put things right, it wasn't with Jesus! It was with the Sanhedrin, his accomplices in crime. It wasn't to God but to the Jewish authorities that he confessed.

Judas was gripped by the *horizontal consequences* of his betrayal but not the *vertical horror* of it!

What he does only compounds his sin: first he bargained with Jesus' enemies, then he betrayed Jesus into their hands, then he experiences a remorse bereft of godly motives, and now he consummates his transgression by committing suicide.

That these religious leaders should now find this so-called "blood money" (v. 6) repugnant reveals how meticulous they can be over the minute details of the law and how utterly calloused when it comes to matters of real importance. They don't think twice about paying blood money to secure the death of an innocent man, but balk at defiling themselves and the temple by using it for some unnamed purpose!

The "potter's field" was one where potters used to obtain their clay, but which had become depleted and was thus offered up for sale. The priests intended to transform this plot of ground into a burial place for strangers. This brings us to what some think are three problems.

(1) Matthew says the priests bought the field, but Acts 1:18 says Judas did. But if the priests considered the money to be the property of Judas, and they surely did, then they would have purchased it in his name or would have at least regarded it as owned by him. The point of the text is simply that the money given to Judas led to the purchase of the field, much as the sentence of death by a judge would lead to the actual execution of a convicted criminal. Furthermore, Acts 1:18 says the field was “acquired” by Judas which, technically speaking, is not the same as saying he “bought” it.

(2) Matthew says that Judas hanged himself, but in Acts 1:18 it says Judas fell headlong and his body burst open and “all his bowels gushed out.” But surely both are true. Since Judas hung himself on the day which was the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the day preceding the Sabbath, no Jew would have dared defile himself by coming into contact with a corpse. A hot sun would have accelerated decomposition until the body fell to the ground and burst open. We should also consider the possibility that his body bursting open in such a gruesome manner is indicative of direct divine judgment, much like what will happen to Herod later in Acts 12:23.

(3) In vv. 9-10 Matthew indicates that this sequence of events is in fulfillment of what was prophesied in Jeremiah. The problem is that on the surface it appears the text in mind is rather from Zechariah 11:12-13. The solution is two-fold. First, the passage Matthew has in mind is probably Jeremiah 19:1-13 where there are several important verbal parallels and linguistic links with what we find in Matthew 27. Second, it isn't unusual for a NT author to “fuse” together under one “quotation” two or more OT sources/references. Says Carson, “Jeremiah alone is mentioned, perhaps because he is the more important of the two prophets, and perhaps also because, though Jeremiah 19 is the less obvious reference, it is the more important as to prophecy and fulfillment” (563).

What practical good can come from a passage such as this, from a sermon that has focused on the betrayal of Jesus by Judas? On the one hand, I suppose I could use this story as a warning for us all to examine our hearts to see what is, in fact, the true state of our souls. After all, Judas had seen the miracles, he had heard all the sermons, he had witnessed the power and the compassion of Jesus, and had been known by others as being among the inner circle of Jesus' friends and followers. Yet he was deceived.

But I would prefer to close with a more positive emphasis. We may not have betrayed Jesus in the way Judas did, but we have all turned from him at certain times in life, perhaps from fear or embarrassment or doubt or anger or bitterness. We have all put on a show of spirituality only to keep our mouths shut when we knew that a fervent and faithful witness to Jesus was called for. Some here have walked away from him and are only now beginning to ask whether restoration is possible. Yes it is! When repentance is genuine, as was Peter's, Jesus stands ready to receive us in love and forgiveness.