

DATE: March 9, 2008

TEXT: Matthew 26: 14-16

TITLE: "The Path to the Cross II: The Betrayal"



When I worked for Young Life in Buffalo, I often worked with youth who were in trouble. I will never forget the story of Anita. I told this story at Seneca Hill at the Youth retreat. Anita was in the Niagara County Jail. She was 15. This is the story of Anita. When she was 14, her parents split up and moved away. Neither wanted Anita, so they just moved without her. To survive she attached herself to a number of men. She was in jail because her latest boyfriend, who was 21, accused her of stealing and called the police. These charges were dropped because the man was reminded of the statutory rape laws. I was called and asked to help this girl. I met with the girl and heard her story. I went to the local High School and arranged a program of education. I arranged a foster care situation with one of the local ministers in town. I then had an additional meeting with Anita. She had just been released from jail that afternoon. I explained all the arrangements that had been made about housing and education. She sat there for a minute or two. I could see she was thinking about it. Than she said, "No, thank you, I will make it on my own." She then got up and

left. I never heard from her again.

In some ways her story reminds me of Judas. So much was offered and so much was rejected. She also reminds me of so many other people. Our Lord offers so much to everyone.

The Biblical promises of abundant joy, meaning, and eternal life are so wonderful and yet the vast majority of people refuse to accept these gifts. Truthfully, many Christians refuse to take these gifts. I want us to look at Judas and see why the gifts of Christ are rejected.

Lesson # 1 People chose destruction because Jesus is not truly believed. Allow me to share with you some of the promises of Jesus. I want to look at one chapter from the Bible. I will be reading selected verses from *Romans Chapter 8*.

- **1Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, 2because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.**
- **5Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. 6The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.**
- **10But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. 11And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.**
- **15For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." 16The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.**

- **17**Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.
- **24**For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? **25**But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.
- **26**In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. **27**And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.
- **28**And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.
- **35**Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?.... **37**No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. **38**For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, **39**neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Unbelievable promises of God for all His children. Why would anyone not accept these gifts? Yet Judas did not. So many of our friends do not.

Look at the life of Judas. He was given so very much. He knew Jesus face to face. He heard Jesus teach. He personally witnessed the miracles. I have often wondered what it must have been like to walk with Jesus 2000 years ago. Judas experienced that. He was called by Jesus to be one of the 12 disciples. He was given so very, very much, but in the end, he did not believe. One of the commentaries made this statement

Judas simply did not believe that Christ was truly God's son. Therefore he did not give his heart and life to Christ. He was a follower of Christ; he was even one of the first twelve

apostles, but he was not a genuine believer who entrusted his life to Christ.

I believe this quote points to a critically important distinction. There is a difference between one who follows Christ and one who believes in and surrenders to Christ. Judas followed Christ for three years but never surrendered to Jesus. The crowds followed Jesus for much of His life but the some of the people in the same crowd yelled "crucify Him" just a few days later. People come to church every week but when they are truly challenged to change their life to mold it to the will of God, they laugh it off and pretend they didn't hear.

Ninety percent of Americans state that they believe in God. On any given Sunday approximately 25 to 40% of Americans are in church. The question I ask is: With those statistics, why is Christianity seemingly having such little impact on our society? I believe the answer is we have people who follow Christ but who do not truly believe in or surrender to Jesus.

I believe one of the motives of Judas was to force the hand of Jesus. Jesus did not fit Judas' idea of a Messiah. Judas wanted a political messiah. He wanted a rebellion against the Romans and the establishment of the messiah on the throne of David. Jesus refused to be that messiah.

Judas tried to twist Jesus into his idea. When this attempt failed, Judas hung himself.

Jesus is rejected when people try to fit Him into their idea of a messiah and squeeze Jesus into their philosophy and systems of ideas. I laugh when I see pictures of Jesus as a light Caucasian with blue eyes. I have never seen a person of Arab descent who was light skinned with blue eyes. Yet we make Jesus look like that.

Scripture is rejected or ignored. I will point out a text that clearly says adultery is sin, or homosexuality is sin, or greed is sin, or anger is sin, or ignoring the hungry is sin, or ignoring the lonely is sin, and people will just nod and think to themselves "that was written 2000 years ago." Or they will nod and say "my life is very different and God would not expect me to believe that." Jesus and the truth He teaches is twisted into something that no longer resembles the Lord revealed in Scripture or the truth revealed in scripture. Jesus is rejected and betrayed when he is squeezed into our lifestyles and belief systems.

Jesus offers so much. His promises are so great, but they must be accepted as they are offered. Jesus makes this statement as recorded in *Luke 9:23*

If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

We cannot follow Christ without taking up the cross. Judas wanted to follow without the cross. He chose betrayal. When try to follow without the cross, without surrender to the will of God, we choose betrayal.

Lesson # 2 The message of Christ is rejected when the path of sin is followed. Jesus taught this truth in Matthew 7

13"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. 14But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

Judas walked with Jesus, but he chose the wide road of sin. Judas had a great gift. He was gifted in the area of finance. He was even more gifted than Matthew, the tax collector. Because of this gift he was made the treasurer of the disciples. The problem was this: His strength became a great weakness. Greed grew and eventually took over. Greed and most other sins are like a cancer. It starts as a healthy cell. It can be used to build the body. But then slowly it mutates. It starts very small. If it is recognized and treated when it is small, it usually can be cured and eliminated from your life. But if it is ignored, if it is allowed to grow, it will often consume the life

and take over and kill the person. For Judas it was greed. He allowed this sin to take over his life. For others it is lust. A sex drive is a gift from God. When it is allowed to mutate and grow, it becomes the sin of lust. Lust destroys many, many people in our society. The desire to work hard and improve our conditions is a gift from God. When it is allowed to mutate and grow into ambition or the desire to “be comfortable,” it becomes sin. Ambition can grow out of control and is destroying many people today. For so many people the desire “to be comfortable” is the absolute ruler of their life. I could go on and on and on. Anger, bitterness, drunkenness, foul language, selfishness can all grow and grow and become a dominate aspect of a person’s life. It is often in an area that God most enriches a person’s life. That gift is twisted into sin. Look at your strengths. See how Satan is attempting to twist that strength into an area of sin.

As I said, for Judas it was greed. At some time in the ministry of Jesus, Judas began to embezzle from the others. Even when Jesus tried to directly point to his sin, he refused to repent and hardened his heart. Finally, he decided to betray Jesus. He was offered only 30 pieces of silver... a very little amount. Why so little? Because the Jewish leaders were already planning to

arrest Jesus after the Passover and the crowds went home. All Judas offered was a more convenient way and a few days earlier. But you see, when sin dominates, even small gratification is desired.

The question to be posed this morning is: Are we truly believing in and following our Lord Jesus? Examine your life and see if there is any sin that is growing within. It is a slow growth and often difficult to detect. Are we in obedience to the Word of God?

It is always tragic when people like Anita chose to walk away from Christ. The great tragedy is we see it all the time. We see neighbors, we see co-workers, we even see loved ones and family refuse to accept the gifts of God. We need to hurt for them, we need to love them and we need to share the message of truth with them. Let us chose to pick up our cross and follow Jesus Christ every day of our lives.

AMEN