

Sunday August 28, 2022  
Lesson 13: Betrayal and Victory  
Scripture: Matthew 26: 47-56

**Context:**

We close our series today with our unit titled “The Pursuit of the People.” The scriptures for today focus on the Passion of our Lord and emphasize Jesus’ response to betrayal in his midst. Our purpose will be to discover how Jesus’ response to hostility shapes our lives in today’s violent world.

The moments of Jesus’ last hours on earth end with perhaps the most infamous betrayal in known history, both in religious and secular circles. Judas Iscariot, one of those who followed Jesus for years, came to betray his teacher and Lord. His motives remain unknown and continue to be up for speculation today.

The arrest scene from the gospel of Matthew has three focal moments. The first is the shocking detail of the hypocritical kiss from Judas; a gesture of affection or honor (see Luke 7:45) which now becomes the sign of betrayal.<sup>1</sup> Time and time again, Jesus throughout all the gospel accounts predicted his death would begin with betrayal. He even indicated it was one among the disciples and thus he tells Judas to fulfill the action he intends to commit. This kiss and Jesus’ reception of such a display of affection amid betrayal shows he will not fight this moment with revenge or retaliation.

Even though Jesus embraces this moment as it comes, his disciples cannot idly stand by as they watch Jesus being grabbed and arrested. One of the disciples, (Peter according to the gospel of John), strikes the high priest’s slave, cutting off his ear. Jesus will not have any of it. He instructs the disciple to place his sword aside and then gives a diatribe about his own power, which could have sufficiently handled this situation. For Matthew, this occasion provides further teaching from Jesus on the subject of nonviolence as he repeats his command from Matt. 5:39: “Do not resist one who is evil.”<sup>2</sup> While Jesus had incredible power, God’s way of dealing with sin is through showing simultaneously weakness and restraint.

The final climax in the scene is Jesus’ self-defense before his disciples and the crowd who has gathered to arrest him. The only thing Jesus will say to those who come to persecute him is how if he was a political threat, they could have arrested him in the temple, where he made himself conspicuous by sitting to teach.<sup>3</sup> He has not hidden and he has nothing to hide. He will stand his ground and even when questioned by Pontius Pilate and the high priests, he will remind them of how if his kingdom was of this world, his followers would be fighting. And yet they do not because Jesus comes from a kingdom unlike any other.

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<sup>1</sup> Douglas A. Hare, “Matthew,” *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2009), 304.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

## Application

The betrayal of Jesus by Judas still hangs heavy today in most Christian circles. Perhaps one of the greatest insults one can hurl is to say: “You Judas!” We know what the term implies in its fullest connotation. When someone is a Judas, they have claimed to love and follow someone, only to betray them and in some cases, to do so with a “kiss,” implying care and affection is part of what is to take place.

I do not know if we will ever discover what drove Judas to do what he did. We may speculate of course, and even develop our own version of the events like “Jesus Christ Superstar,” a musical which seeks to explore the motives of Judas from his point of view. Yet perhaps the bigger focus we should look at is Jesus and how he modeled love and forgiveness in the face of betrayal.

Love and betrayal often go hand in hand. Someone claims to love and care about you, only to eventually to turn you over or even make you a target. The feelings and emotions which often come because of these situations usually lead to broken relationships and years of healing. At some point, all of us will either be betrayed, participate in betrayal, or watch it play out in the lives of others.

Perhaps the scariest thing of betrayals today is they are not like the later aspects of Jesus’ betrayal and how his affairs played out. They are much like what occurs with Judas, where people come with kisses and affection only to arrest and persecute, often never naming the true pain or sadness of the situation. Betrayals need not swords and blood to hurt.

In the Deep South, we especially struggle with this one. We hide behind smiles, false platitudes, and we do our deepest damage in closed rooms or private conversations. At times, we may even outwardly show affection to those we have betrayed because by golly, that’s better than coming out in the open and airing one’s dirty laundry.

So, what is our response as good Christian people when these betrayals come our way, or watch as they come to others? The inner core of us perhaps possesses the desire to be like the disciple with the sword. Let’s take some names and tear into those who seek to wrong or hurt others. Go for the jugular and clean up the mess afterwards. I know with my temper how this impulse is one where I run through several different ways to get the revenge and watch the betrayer fall.

Yet I’ve come to practice the “pause.” Whether it’s in my prayer time, a walk with my dog, a run, a reading of scripture, or a conversation with a holy friend, I begin to realize the anger and lashing out is an attempt to hide pain. And then I remember Jesus in the garden, and I hear him inviting me to put down my sword and to fold into his embrace. There is always pain in being betrayed or watching as others are betrayed. It is painful to watch as people are consumed by greed, sadness, grief, or anger and allowing these unprocessed emotions to lead them to such behaviors. Yet our Lord has shown us how to be in these moments, as tender and frightening as they may be. Jesus shows us how to stand in the face of hostility to show love, grace, and boldness.

What I appreciate about this passage in the face of betrayal is how Jesus does not simply go or allow this wayward disciple to tell the story. He is not passive, and he is not a pushover. He names who he is and how the mob has operated in secret and in the dark of night. Yet he will be the Lord and he will show them of how his true power does not come in

exerting force, but instead in love and confidence.

I think for all of us, the best way to handle betrayals is to seek to follow our Lord. Being violent back will not end the cycle. If anything, it will perpetuate and lead to more violence and more betrayals. In the same breath, when we are betrayed, we are meant to hold our head high and practice love. Even if the betrayer comes with a kiss, we have no shame in allowing their embrace and then making a statement made in truth and love about who we are and who we will be. We surrender ourselves to Jesus and let him lead us in the face of all things, especially in the hostility of this world.

What spiritual disciplines do you practice when you have been betrayed or you are watching others be betrayed? If you could have a conversation with Judas and Jesus, what would you ask them about this passage? Why do you think betrayal and love go hand in hand? How can we respond like Jesus in the face of betrayal and hostility? What kind of witness do we show when we betray or hurt others?

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