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The Treachery of Easter

War is Hell

Shortly after World War I, Erich Maria Remarque wrote the book, *All Quiet on the Western Front* and changed how the world viewed war.

The story begins in Germany at the beginning of World War I. The main character, Paul Baumer, and his buddies are shown as longing to

- Go to war.
- Fight the good fight.
- Participate in all the glory and glamour that war no doubt would bring.

But then Paul goes and discovers that war, far from being the great and exciting adventure that it was thought to be is horrible. War kills, maims, rips and destroys. In fact, at one point in the book, Paul goes home on leave and there he struggles with the excitement and glamour that all were heaping on him — He is the warrior returned! And yet, he knows that he is no hero and that war is not a game.

Now of the many results of this book, it taught the world somewhat of the treachery of war, and so it produced a keen sense of appreciation for the soldier who risked his life in battle. Truly, understanding the treachery involved in the production of any enjoyed benefit leads to a greater appreciation of that benefit.

I want us to look at a greater treachery, than that of war, the treachery of treacheries, the treachery of Easter. While it is very easy to reminisce about the salvation that Christ purchased for us through His life, death, and resurrection; so often we forget that it involved an incredible sacrifice carried out under treacherous circumstances. Dr. John MacArthur wrote this:

“Every true Christian knows that Christ died for our sins... But in the mundane existence of our daily lives, we are too inclined to take the Cross of Christ for granted. We mistakenly think of it as one of the elementary facts of our faith. We therefore neglect to meditate on this truth of all truths, and we miss the real richness of it.”¹

The Background

Matthew 26:47-50 gives a just a portion of the treachery surrounding the Easter Story. At the time of the events of our text, much had gone on.

- Christ had already entered Jerusalem- in what is known as His Triumphal Entry.²
- The crowds at first had welcomed Him as their Messiah, their King.³
- And yet upon His arrival in the city, when Christ did NOT proclaim Himself as King, the crowds began defecting.⁴
- In fact, the disappointment was so great that one of Christ's very own disciples- Judas- went to the chief priests to bargain on how he might betray Christ into their hands.⁵
- When Christ did not turn out to be the kind of “Messiah” that Judas expected he was disillusioned and sought for the means to turn Christ over to the Jewish leaders. Dr. John MacArthur wrote this:

“Judas was severely disappointed that Jesus did not turn out to be the kind of Messiah he expected. Jesus did not overthrow Rome or even the powerful Jewish religious leaders, and consequently He had acquired no positions of prestige and power with which to reward His disciples. Instead of teaching them how to conquer and control, Jesus taught them how to submit and serve. Instead of Judas's being richer than when he began to follow Jesus, it is quite likely he was much poorer.”⁶

- And so, during the Last Supper in the upper room, just after dark, Judas left and sought out the chief priests.⁷
- Judas had been looking for a good opportunity to betray [Christ] to them apart from the multitude⁸ and now was the ideal time.
- Judas rightly surmised that Jesus would soon go to the Garden of Gethsemane⁹ which was the perfect place for Christ's betrayal.
- During this time of year in Jerusalem (Passover), pilgrims thronged the streets throughout most of the night. Thus to avoid commotion, the place of Christ's arrest would have to be obscure and private. The Garden of Gethsemane therefore served as the perfect place. It not only was a secluded and remote place outside of the city wall, but it also would be dark at this point in the evening.

¹ Dr. John MacArthur, *The Murder of Jesus*, Thomas Nelson (April 1, 2004), ISBN-10: 0785260188, pages xiv-xv.

² Compare Matthew 21:1-7

³ Compare Matthew 21:8-9

⁴ Compare Matthew 21:10-17

⁵ Compare Matthew 26:14-19

⁶ Dr. John MacArthur, *MacArthur New Testament Commentary Series, Matthew 24-28*, Moody Publishers (November 8, 1989), ISBN-10: 080240765X, pages 185-186.

⁷ Compare John 13:30

⁸ Compare Luke 22:6

⁹ Compare John 18:2

- So, Judas went to the chief priests with the news that the time was at hand.
- The religious leaders of Judas's day sent out a mob to arrest Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane. Now amazingly, this was not the first time the Chief Priests had set out to arrest Christ. Recall, that the temple guard had been sent out to apprehend Christ.¹⁰ And yet, they failed for “never did a man speak the way this man speaks” (John 7:46). So this time not only did the chief priests send the temple guard¹¹ they also secured the use of the Roman Cohort,¹² a band of 600 men at full strength, and they accompanied this host to arrest Christ.¹³

Judas' Treachery

Now all of this brings us to our text this morning and Judas' treachery.

Matthew 26:47-50, “And while he yet spake, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people. Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he: hold him fast. And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, master; and kissed him. And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come? Then came they, and laid hands on Jesus, and took him.”

This passage addresses one element of the treachery. On that Passover night when the Jewish leaders should have been busy with the activities and festivities of Passover, one of the most important of all Jewish holy days; these leaders, Rome, and Judas were consumed with the murder of Jesus Christ. Now aside from

- Christ's actual betrayal.
- The mock trial.
- The ridicule and jesting on the part of the soldiers.
- The folly of Caiaphas, Herod, and Pilate.
- The denials of Peter.
- And the actual crucifixion.

This passage contains an act of treachery that is almost unanimously renounced by all, everywhere and in every place. Rome's treachery could be chocked up to ignorance. The crowd's treachery could be explained by “mob rule” or simply the “sheep following their shepherd.” The religious leader's treachery is understandable from the perspective of blind unbelief.

Now this is not to say that any of these actions are excusable but what occurs in our passage is so heinous and wicked that the name “Judas” has become a byword for treachery and infamy. Notice our text again, specifically verses 48-49.

Matthew 26:48-49, “Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss¹⁴, that same is he: hold him fast. And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, master; and kissed him.”

In fact Luke records what Christ said at this point.

¹⁰ Compare John 7:32-26

¹¹ Compare Luke 22:52

¹² Compare John 18:3

¹³ Compare also Luke 22:52 It is interesting to note that when the four gospel accounts are placed side by side it is apparent that not only were the chief priests and other temple officials behind the plot to arrest Christ (Lke 22:4), but also the Pharisees (John 18:3), the Sadducees, and the entire Sanhedrin (Mark 15:1; Acts 23:6). Thus, the total number of men who came with Judas to the garden could have approached as high as 1000 individuals!

¹⁴ φιλεω phileo

Luke 22:48, “But Jesus said unto him, Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss¹⁵?”

The treachery that I want to address this morning is the treachery of Judas's betraying Christ with a kiss! This is no ordinary kiss. The word used here is one of friendship and was a sign of homage in Christ's day. Because of his lowly status, a slave would kiss the feet of his master or other notable person. Servants typically kissed the back of the hand. And those above the Servant kissed the palm of the hand. To kiss the hem of a person's garment was a sign of reverence and devotion. But, to kiss the cheek of another was reserved only for those with whom one had a close, intimate relationship. The kiss on the cheek was a sign of close affection and love, reserved only for those with whom one had a close, intimate relationship.

And thus, of all signs with which to betray Christ, Judas chose that which is perhaps the most despicable. It was not simply because of the act but because Judas perverted it so hypocritically and treacherously. See, Judas could have pointed out the identity of Jesus in a variety of ways. Yet, Judas chose to use the kiss! And yet, it wasn't just a little kiss that Judas gave, notice:

Matthew 26:49, “And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, master; and kissed¹⁶ him.”

This is an intensified form of the word used in verse 48. In verse 48, Judas said that he would betray Christ with a simple kiss. Yet, when the time came for the kiss, we read literally, “and immediately he went to Jesus and said, 'Hail, Rabbi!' and fervently and repeatedly kissed Him.”

In fact, the word used in this context is the same word used in Luke 7 of the woman who came into the Pharisee's house and kissed Jesus' feet.¹⁷ It is use of the father's response to the return of his prodigal son, where the father continuously kissed him.¹⁸ It is the word use of the Ephesian elders when they said goodbye to Paul, they wept and repeatedly kissed him.¹⁹ It was this strong display of affection and love that Judas used to signify the identity of the One he sought to betray! What Treachery!

And so, surrounding the death and resurrection of Christ was the treacherous activity of Judas! Now what is the significance in all of this? How does this relate to our lives?

The Significance

As I have already said, there have been very few since the betrayal of Christ who haven't been utterly and completely shocked at the treachery of Judas. And yet, I would suggest that we have not fully understood Judas's treachery, and thus the treachery of Easter, until we personalize it! We must recognize the we ourselves are guilty of like-treachery against Christ!

Acts 7 is the account in which Stephen is being tried for following Christ. In his defense, Stephen recited the history of Israel in which he accused the religious leaders of his day with treachery.

Acts 7:51-53, “Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and

¹⁵ φιλημα philema

¹⁶ καταφιλεω kataphileo

¹⁷ Compare Luke 7:38-45

¹⁸ Compare Luke 15:20

¹⁹ Compare Acts 20:37

murderers: Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.”

Stephen here accuses the religious leaders of his day of being guilty of the murders of the prophets who lived centuries before them. Why? What made these leaders guilty of such treachery?

Notice, they, “received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it” (Acts 7:53).

Do you see Stephen’s point?

Violence and treachery against God and His kingdom occurs NOT ONLY when someone actively opposes Him, as did

- Those who killed the prophets of old.
- Judas.

BUT ALSO when WE simply disobey God! When we

- Know what is right, and do not do it.
- Are aware of our duty, and yet refuse.
- Fail to do and be all that God has called us to do and be.
- Lie.
- Steal.
- Covet or boast.

All is akin to the treachery surrounding that first Easter! W.S. Plumer put it this way:

“We never see sin aright until we see it as against God... All sin is against God in this sense: that it is His law that is broken, His authority that is despised, His government that is set at naught.”²⁰

Truly, all of us here this morning are guilty of the treachery of Easter! And yet, how is that? How am I guilty of such treachery?

First off we are guilty of this treachery because if there had never been a sin in this world and yet, one committed those seemingly insignificant sins that we so easily justify, then all the horror and treachery surrounding the crucifixion and death of Christ would still have occurred. In other words, it was MY SIN

- That betrayed Christ.
- That nailed Him to the Cross.
- On account of which Jesus cried, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me” (Matthew 27:46)!
- For which He suffered Hell on the Cross!
- That led to the kiss of the traitor!

That is why on the day of Pentecost Peter could say, speaking to ones not even in Jerusalem that day, “Men of Israel... you nailed [Christ] to a cross... and put *Him* to death” (Acts 2:22-23).

Now, one can respond to this BAD NEWS the same way as did the leaders hearing Stephen's accusation.

²⁰ A quote of W. S. Plumer, found in Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness*, Nav Press Publishing Group, February 2006, ISBN-13: 9781576839324, pages, 20-21.

Acts 7:54, “When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth.”

You can

- Get angry and mad at me.
- Gnash your teeth in anger.
- Call for my death.

Or you can respond as did the people on the day of Pentecost after Peter accused the crowd of the treachery of Easter.²¹ We read this:

Acts 2:37-38, “Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”

Which will be your response this day?

Will you choose the path of Judas and the Religious Leaders of his day which lead to

- Violence?
- Death?
- Suicide- as in the case of Judas?

Or will you choose the path that leads to peace with God?

See, the teaching of Scripture is that ALL are guilty of the treachery of Easter.

Romans 3:10-12, “As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.”

Romans 3:23, “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”

ALL therefore are DOOMED to an eternity in hell on account of their treachery.

Romans 2:5, “But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.”

And yet, Christ Himself died in the sinner's place that the sinner might live with God.

Isaiah 53:6, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

Oh how I plead with you! Jesus Christ

- Died on the cross to pay for the sin of which you and I are guilty.

²¹ Compare Acts 2:23

- Died in our place.
- Died the death that was intended for you on account of your sin.

Let us therefore

- Remain no longer in our sin.
- Go to the cross this day.
- Confess and turn from our sin.
- Trust/rely upon Christ to save you.
- Ask for God's forgiveness.
- And be Saved!

It is my prayer that the treachery of Easter may cease in your life this day by all of us here becoming children of God through faith in Christ to save us!

About Bethel Presbyterian Church

The Bethel Presbyterian Church Ministry of the Word is published regularly.

VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO

Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

All our sermons can be accessed via the World Wide Web. The recording for this sermon and these notes can be found at [Easter Treachery](#). The web address for all sermons at Bethel Presbyterian Church can be found out as follows: <http://bethelpresbyterian.sermonaudio.com>

About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on March 23, 2007. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church