



BETHEL
PRESBYTERIAN

MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Volume 18 Issue 16

April 21, 2019

The Treachery of Easter

Shortly after WWI, Erich 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 WWI. The main character, Paul Baumer, and his buddies are yearning to go to war! As long as they were home they were missing out on all the glory and fun that accompanied war! So they believed. But then Baumer goes and discovers that far from being the great and exciting adventure that it was thought to be, war is horrible! It kills and maims; it rips, destroys, and terrorizes! In fact, at one point in the book, Baumer is able to go home on leave. While there he struggles with

the excitement and glamour surrounding his return! He knows that he is no hero and war is no game!

Of the many results of this book, it taught the world somewhat of the treachery of war! As such, 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.

In light of that, I want us to look at the treachery of Easter. For 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 treacherous circumstances. Dr. John MacArthur wrote: (MacArthur, 2004)

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. (MacArthur, 2004, pp. xiv-xv)

And so, today let's consider one facet of the Treachery surrounding that first Easter as described in Matthew 26:47-50. And to do that, let's begin first by looking at the gospel accounts of Christ.

The gospels give us good understanding of what occurred in the previous week of Christ's life.

- The Saturday before His execution, Christ was in Bethany at the home of Simon the Leper. Here a woman anointed Christ's head by pouring a very expensive vial of perfume on it (cf. Matthew 26:6-13). Recall this act made Judas angry (for he secretly stole from the money purse [as he was in charge of it] and this vial, had it been sold, would have fetched a pretty penny). When Judas pointed out the money that could have been made from the sale of the perfume, recall Christ's words, "For the poor you have with you always; but you do not always have Me. For when she poured this perfume upon My body, she did it to prepare Me for burial." (Matthew 26:11-12)! This was the last straw for Judas; from this time on he began looking for an opportunity to betray Jesus! John MacArthur put it this way:

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. (MacArthur, 1989)

- On Sunday, Christ entered into Jerusalem on a donkey with the crowds waving palm branches crying, "Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed is He who comes in the name of

the Lord; hosanna in the highest!" (Matthew 21:9)¹ Once again this is known as the Triumphal Entry! Following this entry into Jerusalem, Christ did NOT forcefully remove the Romans from the Temple Mount, BUT turned His focus against the unlawful market that had been erected in the Court of the Gentiles which the Chief Priest established in order to make money off of God's people when they worshipped (Matthew 21:12-17)!

After casting out the money changers, Christ remained on the temple mount teaching the crowds and talking with the religious leaders concerning the essence of serving God (Matthew 21-23). And once again, all of this was a disappointment to the crowds who thought that Christ had come to conquer Rome.

- On Monday, Judas secretly met with the High Priests and offered to betray Christ if they paid him 30 pieces of silver (Matthew 26:14-19). This led to a secret meeting of Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin where they solidified their plans to arrest, try, and execute Christ (cf. Matthew 26:3-5; John 11:47-50, 53)!

During this time, Christ shifted his focus yet again to His Disciples where He continued to teach them about the nature of God's coming Kingdom.

- This occupied the Lord until Wednesday where Jesus led His disciples to an Olive Grove just outside the city where He taught them about the destruction of the Temple and His Second Coming (Matthew 24-25).²
- The next day, Thursday, Christ and the Disciples enjoyed the Passover where Christ transformed Passover into what we call the Lord's Supper (Matthew 26:20-29)!
- That evening- midnight- and into Friday, Christ returned to the Olive Grove to pray (Matthew 26:30ff). It was here that Christ was arrested!

It is apparent from the Bible that NOT ONLY did the chief priests send the temple guard (Luke 22:52), BUT they also secured the use of a Roman Cohort (John 18:3) which would have number 600 men. With the support and strength of this large crowd approaching 1,000 in size,³ these religious leaders arrested Christ (cf. Luke 22:52).

- Christ was then brought before Annas,⁴ then Caiaphas⁵ and the Sanhedrin (for a mock trial), then Pilate, then Herod Antipas, and finally back to Pilate who condemned Christ to die by crucifixion- which began at 9:00 that morning (Friday) and ended at 3:00 that afternoon when, "...[Jesus] cried out again with a loud voice [saying 'It is finished,' John 19:30], and yielded up *His* spirit!" (Matthew 27:50b)

All of this brings us to our text this morning and Judas' Treachery which occurred in the garden right before Christ was arrested.

Matthew 26:47-50: "And while He was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the twelve, came

up, accompanied by a great multitude with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and elders of the people [again, we are talking here about 1,000 people]. Now he who was betraying Him gave them a sign, saying, 'Whomever I shall kiss, He is the one; seize Him.' And immediately he went to Jesus and said, 'Hail, Rabbi!' and kissed Him. And Jesus said to him, 'Friend, do what you have come for.' Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and seized Him."

This passage addresses one element of the treachery of Easter. 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 Christ! Now aside from

- (1) Christ's actual betrayal
- (2) The mock trial
- (3) The ridicule and jesting on the part of the soldiers
- (4) The folly of Caiaphas, Herod, and Pilate
- (5) The denials of Peter, and
- (6) The actual crucifixion, this passage contains an act of treachery that is renounced by almost every scholar who has studied this text.

See, Rome's Treachery could be chalked up to ignorance. The Crowd's Treachery could be explained by "mob rule." The Religious Leader's Treachery is understandable from the perspective of blind unbelief. (Not to say that any of these actions are excusable) but what occurred in our passage is so heinous and wicked that the name "Judas" has become a byword for treachery and infamy! Notice the text again, specifically:

Matthew 26:48-49: "Now he who was betraying Him gave them a sign, saying, 'Whomever I shall kiss, He is the one; seize Him.' And immediately he went to Jesus and said, 'Hail, Rabbi!' and kissed Him."

For those of you who saw Schindler's List, recall the scene when Oscar Schindler listened to the struggle that Helen Hirsch related to him (recall, Helen essentially was a Jewish "slave" to the Commandant of Concentration camp where she was interned). As she struggled with the anguish and grief of her situation, Schindler leaned over and gave her a kiss on the forehead saying, *"It's alright. It's not that kind of a kiss."*

We recognize that there are different kinds of kisses. There is the kiss one might give to a parent or a child. There is the kiss that one might give to comfort someone hurting. There is the kiss of greeting as well as the kiss of celebration. Yet in no culture at any time or in any place does one associate a kiss with betrayal. Yet that is how Judas utilized this sign of love, support, and commitment. In fact, so shocking was Judas' action, Luke records the words Christ spoke to Judas right before the betrayal.

Luke 22:48, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?"

From this you must see that what Judas did here was unspeakably wicked, horrible, Treacherous! See, the “kiss” mentioned by Judas in this and our text- in the Greek it is φιλέω (*phileō*)- was a sign of homage in Christ’s day. For example, 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. And thus, of all signs with which to betray Christ, Judas chose that which is perhaps the most despicable- NOT simply because of the act, BUT because Judas used it so hypocritically and treacherously. Think of it! Judas could have pointed out the identity of Jesus in a variety of ways. Yet, Judas chose to use a kiss! And yet, it wasn’t just a little kiss that Judas gave, notice...

Luke 22:49, “And immediately he went to Jesus and said, ‘Hail, Rabbi!’ and kissed Him.”

The word here is καταφιλέω (*kataphileō*). This is an intensified form of the word used in v. 48. There Judas said that he would betray Christ with a simple kiss. Yet, when the time came for the kiss, we read literally, “...he went to Jesus and said, ‘Hail, Rabbi!’ and fervently and repeatedly kissed Him.”⁶

From this I want you to see that surrounding the death of Christ was the treacherous activity of Judas! Now, what is the significance of this? How does this relate to our lives? Turn with me to Acts 7:51-53.

As treacherous as was the sign Judas utilized in betraying Christ (a kiss), I would suggest that we have NOT fully understood Judas’s treachery- and thus the treachery of Easter- until we personalize it and so recognize that WE OURSELVES are guilty of like-treachery against the Lord! This 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, “You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become; you who received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it.”

Stephen accused the religious leaders of his day of being guilty of the murders of the prophets who lived centuries before them. How so? What made these leaders guilty of such treachery? Notice, they:

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

Do you see Stephen’s point? Violence and treachery against God and His kingdom occur NOT ONLY when someone actively opposes Him- as (1) did those who killed the prophets of old

and/or (2) as Judas- BUT ALSO when WE disobey God! When we know what is right, and do not do it. Or when we are aware of our duty and refuse to do it. Or when we fail to do and be all that God has called us to do and be. Or when we lie, cheat, steal, covet or boast. All this is akin to the treachery surrounding that first Easter!

W.S. Plumer said:

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.' (Bridges, 2016, pp. 20-21)

From this I hope you see that all of us are guilty of the treachery of Easter! Think of it, if there had never been a sin in this world and you committed those seemingly insignificant sins you so easily justify, all the horror and treachery surrounding the crucifixion and death of Christ would still have occurred!

From this I want you to see: It is our sin...

- That betrayed Christ and so 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 when Christ was crucified.

Acts 2:22a, 23b, "Men of Israel... you nailed [Christ] to a cross... and put *Him* to death."

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

Acts 7:54, "Now when they heard this, they were cut to the quick, and they began gnashing their teeth at him."

And so you can get angry/mad and so resent the accusation.

Or you can respond as did the people on the day of Pentecost. After Peter accused the crowd of the treachery of Easter (Acts 2:23), we read:

Acts 2:37-38a: "Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?' And Peter said to them, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Which will be your response this day? Will you choose the path of Judas and the Religious Leaders of his day which led to violence, death, or 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, 23, "There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one... all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

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

Romans 2:5, "But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in 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 of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him."

Oh how I plead with you! Jesus Christ died in our place on the cross to pay for the sin of which you and I are guilty. His death 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 us
- Ask for God's forgiveness
- Confess and turn from your sin.

And be Saved!

Works Cited

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- MacArthur, D. J. (1989). *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Matthew 24-28* (*MacArthur New Testament Commentary Series*). Chicago: Moody Publishers.

End Note(s)

¹ You heard it right... it clearly was not Matthew's intention to give us an historical treatment on Christ's last week. He organized this gospel thematically in order to teach the Jews about their Messiah! Accordingly, the events of Christ's last week are not in sequential order.

² This was two days prior to the crucifixion, cf. Matthew 26:1-2.

³ 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 (Luke 22:4), but also the Pharisees (John 18:3), the Sadducees, and the entire Sanhedrin (Mk. 15:1; Acts 23:6). Thus, the total number of men who came with Judas to the garden could have approached as high as 1,000 individuals!

⁴ High Priest from 6 to 15 AD.

⁵ High Priest from 18 to 36 AD.

⁶ In fact, the word used in this context is the same word used in (1) Luke 7:38, 45: of the woman who came into the Pharisees house and kissed Jesus' feet, (2) Luke 15:20: of the father's response to the return of his prodigal son- he continuously kissed him, and (3) Acts 20:37: of the Ephesian elders when they said goodbye to Paul- they wept and repeatedly kissed him. It was this strong display of affection and love that Judas used to signify the identity of the One he sought to betray! That is Treachery!