

Jesus Faced his Betrayer

Mark 14:43–52
Frank Walker, Ph.D.

How low can a man go? David's sins were horrible; Saul's and Shimei's were even worse. And what about our own — the horrendous things we've done that we don't want anyone to know about?

Now, to be sure, I'm not a big fan of measuring one person's sins against another's. That just leads to boasting about wickedness. Sin is sin, and there's no justification for any of it. The best contrast isn't between the sins of two sinners, but between a sinner's sins and the perfect obedience of Jesus Christ. Compared to our Savior's righteousness, every man's sins are nothing but darkness and evil.

The contrast in today's text couldn't be clearer. Judas, who followed Jesus as one of his apostles, betrayed him, even sealing his betrayal with a pretentious kiss. But Jesus, who had harmed no one but had only done good as he taught the people and healed them, was treated as the worst criminals of all time. Yet, he submitted himself to this abuse, knowing that it was his Father's will. Mark wrote, *And Jesus answered and said unto them, Are ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and with staves to take me? I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and ye took me not: but the scriptures must be fulfilled.*

But Judas' sins weren't the only ones exposed by the light of God the Son in our text. All the disciples forsook Jesus. The mob even chased away a young man who fled with nothing on.

These are the things we want to look at this morning.

The Betrayal

Today's passage begins with a record of Judas' betrayal. Jesus had just started to lead his disciples out of the garden to face his traitor, probably making it only to the garden's entrance where he had left eight of them behind, when the traitor himself showed up with a band of thugs. Note the word *immediately* in verse 43: *And immediately, while he yet spake, cometh Judas, one of the twelve, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders.*

We learn a lot about Judas here. Even the way Mark identified him emphasizes how bad he was. Mark didn't say that Judas Iscariot came out to meet Jesus, but *Judas, one of the twelve*. Mark put it like this to remind us that Judas had been especially honored to have been appointed an apostle. He had been with Jesus during his earthly ministry. He knew him personally, heard him teach, witnessed his miracles, ate with him, received his private instruction, and had all the privileges of special fellowship. Yet, this is the one who led *a great multitude* out against him.

So, Judas wasn't a mere bystander who just happened to turn Jesus in. He knew exactly what he was doing, viz., betraying not just a man who had called him his *friend*, as Jesus did in Matthew's account of this incident (Matt. 26:50), but the Lord and Savior of his people. His offense was so great that it's no wonder that Jesus identified him *the son of perdition* (John 17:12) — not 'a son of perdition,' as if he were just one among many sons of perdition, but *the son of perdition*, the chief of them all. More than anyone else, he positioned himself against the Son of God.

But Judas didn't go out to Jesus alone or even with a mere handful of soldiers. Verse 43 says that the Sanhedrin, the seventy Jewish leaders who comprised the supreme court of Judaism, accompanied him — *the chief priests and the scribes and the elders*. Luke's account includes *the captains of the temple* (Luke 22:52), i.e., Levites who were charged with temple security, Jerusalem's police force. And John mentioned a cohort of Roman soldiers (John 18:3). A cohort normally included six hundred men. It's not clear that all six hundred were there for Jesus' arrest, but quite a few were. This huge show of force was a tremendous overkill. And it was made even worse because they armed themselves with swords and staves. Were they afraid that the Galileans, many of whom were in Jerusalem for the Passover, would resist them? Probably not, since everything in our text took place in the middle of the night.

No, the reason for this great show of force has more to do with what Jesus said about himself, viz., that he was God come in the flesh. Many of these people had seen his miracles, which confirmed his unique power. John's gospel shows Jesus demonstrating his divine power. When he identified himself simply as *I am*, the name by which he made himself known to Moses at the burning bush, all his adversaries fell backward to the ground. One commentator believes this was a miracle — Jesus revealing his sovereign power to his enemies by knocking them to the ground. Because they expected something like this, the Jewish officials and Roman soldiers went out to arrest Jesus *en masse*.

But Judas was, by far, the worst of the bunch. Jesus had already warned him not to do this awful thing, but he did it anyway. Then he sealed it all with a kiss as the token of his betrayal. His kiss wasn't just a customary sign of friendship, which men often used in the first century to greet one another. Christian brothers used it, too. The New Testament calls it the holy kiss (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor.

16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:26). But Judas' kiss was that of a disciple greeting his Lord. He said so in verse 45, where he called Jesus his *master* or, more literally, *rabbi*. Judas pretended that nothing had changed, that he loved Jesus just as much as anyone else. And not just that, but the word translated *kissed* in verse 45 adds even more to its horror. Why? Because it's not the usual word for kiss. It's not even the same word used in verse 44, where Judas said he would identify Jesus with a kiss. The word used in verse 45 is stronger. It could mean he kissed Jesus for a long time, kissed him several times or kissed him fervently. But what a kiss it was! It was a kiss straight out of hell itself.

Peter's Sword

With Judas' kiss, the authorities took Jesus into custody. Then someone got in the way. Verse 47 says, *And one of them that stood by drew a sword, and smote a servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear.* We know from John 18:10 that Peter was the disciple who drew the sword, and Malchus was the servant whose ear he cut off.

John's gospel also suggests what Peter was thinking when he did this. He thought he could keep Jesus from the suffering and death that his Father had appointed for him. That's why Jesus said to him in John 18:11, *Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?*

This wasn't the only time Peter tried to do something like this. When Jesus first announced his death in chapter 8, Peter rebuked him, as if his word had the power to alter God's plan. He had convinced himself that there had to be an easier way for Jesus to fulfill his mission, one that didn't involve scandal, suffering and death. But do you remember what Jesus did then? He turned around and rebuked Peter for even suggesting such a thing, saying, *Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men* (Mark 8:33). Peter was wrong then, and he was just as wrong in our text.

Perhaps lunging toward one of Jesus' enemies and cutting off his ear was Peter's way of vindicating himself. He said he wouldn't be offended by anything that night. He insisted he would never deny Jesus, even if he were imprisoned or put to death. In his mind, Jesus was mistaken about all of this. So, he tried to prove his loyalty amid all the madness that was just beginning. Maybe what he had just seen emboldened him to do this — the sovereign Son of God throwing his enemies to the ground.

Peter still believed that Jesus' death was an unnecessary part of God's plan. He didn't need to die. He was tempting Jesus just like he had done earlier, but this time it was much worse. He didn't just rebuke Jesus, but he took his short sword from its scabbard and led an assault.

Peter didn't understand that eternal life cannot be won with ordinary weapons. Jesus said, as Matthew wrote, *Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword* (Matt. 26:52). If Jesus had wanted out of this situation and if it had been his Father's will to grant his request, he could have summoned twelve legions of angels to his aid. But he had to fulfill the Scriptures. He had to die. He was determined to give his life a ransom for many.

A Certain Young Man

The last two verses of our text reveal a part of the story found only in Mark's gospel, viz., the appearance of *a certain young man*. Mark didn't give us his name. He just said that he followed Jesus until the mob chased him away.

Who was this young man? We can't be absolutely certain, But I think we can safely rule out the suggestion of some that he was the same young man who stood by Jesus' tomb after his resurrection (Mark 16:5). Those who hold to this view suppose that this man's presence is merely symbolic: his naked flight corresponds to Jesus' death, and his appearance at Jesus' empty grave confirms his resurrection.

Historically, most Bible-believing commentators have held that the young man who fled was Mark himself. It's possible that the upper room where Jesus met with his disciples was in a house that belonged to Mark's family. Later, in the book of Acts, his mother's house served as a gathering place for early Christians. Acts 12:12 says, *And when [Peter] had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying*. Perhaps the noise of Jesus and his disciples leaving earlier that evening awakened Mark. Not wanting to be left behind, he threw on the only clothing he could find — a linen cloth. And the fact that his cloth was linen confirms that his family was well off.

Commentators also note that there's no clearly discernible reason for Mark including this incident in his gospel unless it establishes him as an eyewitness of Jesus' suffering and death, or at least this part of it. He saw the events he wrote about and, therefore, could confirm Peter's account. Remember that Mark wrote Peter's memoirs, i.e., his account of the gospel. But the appearance of this young man does even more. It also establishes that Mark, like Jesus' other disciples, fled when everything turned sour. He fled even though he had no direct connection with Jesus. He wasn't one of the twelve who had traveled with Jesus every day.

There's an old song that asks, "Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?" After each series of questions in this song, the refrain says, "Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble."

Tremble. Why tremble? Is it because what we would have seen if we had been there was so horrible and yet so amazing that it would have left us in awe? Obviously true. But could it also be because we know that we would have fled just like everyone else? If we had been there that night, could we have been among those who drove the nails into Jesus' hands and feet?

As we sit here safely two thousand years later, it's easy to say, *If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise* (Mk 14:31) because we know we won't ever be in that exact situation. Our Lord will never be crucified again. But don't we find ourselves in a similar situation when the same temptation confronts us? How many times have we had the opportunity to own Jesus as our Savior and for one reason or another — fear, not knowing what to say, we had something else we had to do, or we just didn't want to be bothered with it — failed to identify with him in his suffering and death? Are our situations really that much different?

May the Lord keep us true to himself every day! I'll close this morning by reminding you of a few words from the second chapter of Revelation: *Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life* (Rev. 2:10). Amen.