

Series: Death and Resurrection: Why Jesus Had to Die
Sermon: Peter's Denial (alt: When You Betray Christ)
Text: Luke 22.47-62

Judas the Betrayer

We pick up immediately from where we left off. Jesus finishes this incredible prayer, "Not my will, but yours be done." He wants to avoid suffering but he wants the Father's will even more. And so he surrenders to the Father's will. And now the Father's will, for his suffering, is coming. Nothing that is about to happen is a surprise to God. **Nothing that happens in your life is ever a surprise to God.**

47 While he was still speaking, suddenly a mob came, and one of the Twelve named Judas was leading them.

Judas is leading the group. He is one of the 12 disciples. The other gospels tell us he recently made a deal with the Pharisees to betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. And at the last supper Jesus identified Judas as the betrayer and told him to go and do what he had set in his heart to do.¹ So here Judas is. Doing what he came to do. Betraying his friend.

He came near Jesus to kiss him, 48 but Jesus said to him, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?"

With a kiss Judas? The proximity is so insulting. Like...are you really going to act like you love me WHILE you are betraying me? Are you going to PRETEND to be my friend while you stab me in the back? Are you going to PRETEND to be a follower of

¹ Summary of Matthew 26 & John 13.

Christ in the very moment while you are betraying Christ? **The betrayer is also the pretender. I don't think there is a better depiction of Christian sin than this.** With the very lips you sing praise to Jesus and the very lips you sip the cup of communion, you also use those lips to speak lies and harsh words and false promises. We kiss the devil with the same lips we kiss Jesus with. That's what our sin is as Christians.

49 When those around him saw what was going to happen, they asked, "Lord, should we strike with the sword?" 50 Then one of them struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear.

Ok. First, any of ya'll that have ever been in a brawl...especially one at night...you know how tense the moment is before somebody throws the first punch. To clarify, I'm not speaking from experience here. I mean everybody is on super high alert. This ask was not a calm thing. This was a guy in his boy's ear like...*hey, want me to bust him up?* And that guy's name is Peter.² Peter is jumpy. He's the guy you want to have your back...but you don't want him drinking coffee before a fight. It's kind of how Peter was. Impulsive with big emotions. I picture him to be a broad shouldered, loud, extroverted and assertive man with crazy eyes who is always sweating. That's not written anywhere, that's just my image. So, Peter swings and either goes for the head and has bad aim, or maybe the guy has a helmet and it glances off and gets the ear. We don't know. We know Peter has made a preemptive strike. And we know Jesus doesn't celebrate it.

² John 18.30

51 But Jesus responded, “No more of this!” And touching his ear, he healed him.

In the middle of his own arrest. In front of the very people who are arresting him, he heals one of his enemies. I want you to see two things about Jesus right here. In the middle of darkness where it seems like evil is winning...

- **Jesus is fully in control.** He can calm everything. Stop everything. And heal an ear that’s been cut off. Heal completely. He rebukes his disciples and is CLEARLY in command of this scene. With a touch...he heals. The one who created the universe has never stopped being in control of it. He is completely in control. What feels out of control in your life? I want you to take a deep breath. Maybe go to bed early tonight because Jesus is in control. Even the fact that Peter struck first, which gives the mob the cover it needs to arrest Jesus...that isn’t a surprise to Jesus. In fact, back in verse 38 Jesus said hey this is coming and the disciples go “Hey Jesus, here are two swords!” And Jesus says “That’s enough.” Clearly Peter didn’t think Jesus knew what was up. So he brought a BACK UP plan in case Jesus needed his help. Faith in Jesus PLUS a back-up plan. Some of ya’ll have Peter-like faith. Yes, Jesus, I trust you, but here’s my back-up plan in case you need my help. What security are you trusting in IF Jesus doesn’t work out for you? That’s your actual God. Forever mine was money. Jesus I’ll follow you into ministry but I’m going to set all this aside and grow it so that I can act like I depend on you BUT ACTUALLY I’ll be ok if following

you doesn’t work out. Here’s the other thing all over our passages today:

- **Jesus is full of grace.** The guy who Peter slices up...his name is Malchus. Can you imagine the whirlwind of emotions this guy goes through? He’s there to arrest Jesus. And Jesus HEALS HIM! What grace. **Romans 12.14-21 says, “bless those who persecute you.”** Where do you think Paul got that from? From Christ who heals his enemies. From Christ who says when your enemy strikes you, turn the other cheek to him.³ What he does with Malchus is a vivid foreshadowing of what he does on the cross. Father, forgive them...He takes the sins of the very people who put him there. He is SO full of grace. And if you can STOP...and see the grace of Christ in this moment...that both PETER and JUDAS are watching...it will help you process the gospel of grace that Jesus offers to you. He is in control and he is full of grace.

52 Then Jesus said to the chief priests, temple police, and the elders who had come for him, “Have you come out with swords and clubs as if I were a criminal? 53 Every day while I was with you in the temple, you never laid a hand on me. But this is your hour — and the dominion of darkness.”

He’s not a criminal. And it’s not that he’s breaking laws...it’s that they hate him. They hate his claim of authority. They hate how he is a threat to their power because they can’t control him. And this is most non-Christians by the way. Some people are genuine secular humanists. They think there is no god and religion is a construction of humans who aren’t strong or

³ Matthew 5.39

smart enough to deal with reality. But that's not who is out here arresting Jesus. **It's the religious ones who should know who he is.** And instead of seeing him as Messiah they see him as a threat. They thought they had God figured out. Neatly packaged in such a way they could control their own lives with God's approval and here comes Jesus claiming he is the one in charge of their lives. **Some of ya'll, I wonder, if in your heart you want to crucify Jesus because of how much disruption he is trying to bring into your life.**

This is your hour – the dominion of darkness. And let me just say that just because it's their hour doesn't mean it isn't God's hour. In fact, the hour of darkness becomes the very thing we celebrate as GOOD Friday. Because God...still fully in control...used their darkness to bring about our redemption. Their hour is like "your turn to take center stage" but just because they are on center stage doesn't mean it isn't God's play and God's theater. Maybe you FEEL darkness right now...you've been hurt or wounded or maybe you are just SPIRALING in your betrayal of Jesus...I want you to know just because darkness is center stage doesn't mean God has left the director's chair. He's completely in control. And he's full of grace. In fact, when Jesus dies it says darkness covers the earth and the ground shakes and at the same time the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. What seemed like defeat was actually victory for sinners. God from heaven tearing down the very thing that separated you and I from his presence.

And this is big. Because when you betray Jesus...and the darkness of your sin finally sets in...I want you to remember right here that he is fully in control. You didn't outwit God; you didn't surprise God. Yes, you rejected him...but your hour

of darkness doesn't have to be the final word on your story. It was the final word on Judas' story. He never got past his betrayal of Jesus. his sin, and the darkness it brought on, consumed him.

3 Then Judas, his betrayer, seeing that Jesus had been condemned, was full of remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders. 4 "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood," he said. "What's that to us?" they said. "See to it yourself!" 5 So he threw the silver into the temple and departed. Then he went and hanged himself. -- Matthew 27:3-5

Judas' regret eventually consumed him to the point that he killed himself. That is one path sin can take you on. Slowly killing you inside. It doesn't have to consume you though. I need to stop right here for a moment and say that **if you are struggling with these kinds of thoughts**, if your sin has completely consumed you and you feel the suffocating, overwhelming weight of it...God is still in control and the person you came with, please tell them. Just reach over and squeeze their hand right now to let them know this is your confession that you are in a dark, hopeless place and you need the grace of God to be your lifeline right now. This isn't the end of your story and it doesn't have to continue to be your path. That is just one path sin can take you on, but it is not the only path. There is freedom and hope and forgiveness in Christ today, church. I need you to hear me say that.

Now, let's see our comparison with Peter.

Peter the Denier

54 They seized him, led him away, and brought him into the high priest's house. Meanwhile Peter was following at a distance.

There is a reason Peter is such a great teacher for us. Such a great example for us. Because all of us can relate to the experience of Peter in some way. He was ALL FOR Jesus. And then, what he thought was an act of loyalty...Jesus rebuked. Which, by the way, was not the first time that had happened. One time earlier he tried to rebuke Jesus when Jesus said he was going to be killed by this very group that arrested him and Peter said "Oh no, Lord! This will never happen to you!"⁴ And Jesus whips around and says to Peter, "Get behind me Satan!" Stinging rebuke. See Peter just CANNOT accept Jesus is going to die for his sins. He thinks it should be the reverse. On top of that experience...while they were at dinner...this conversation happened...

31 "Simon, Simon, look out. Satan has asked to sift you like wheat. 32 But I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And you, when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."

33 "Lord," he told him, "I'm ready to go with you both to prison and to death."

34 "I tell you, Peter," he said, "the rooster will not crow today until you deny three times that you know me." -- Luke 22:31-34

So here is Peter who thinks he is being loyal and Jesus keeps saying and doing things that don't make sense to his loyalty.

It's almost like Jesus is rejecting HIM by saying he will reject Jesus. And then the sword incident...Jesus rebukes him at the moment of arrest. So here is Peter...swirling in self-doubt and confusion. But man...loyal enough to follow. Didn't just run away when the rest did. Followed. But confused. Unsure. Perfect time for the enemy to sift him like wheat. Let me just let these next few verses unfold for you.

55 They lit a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, and Peter sat among them. 56 When a servant saw him sitting in the light, and looked closely at him, she said, "This man was with him too." 57 But he denied it: "Woman, I don't know him."

58 After a little while, someone else saw him and said, "You're one of them too."

"Man, I am not!" Peter said.

59 About an hour later, another kept insisting, "This man was certainly with him, since he's also a Galilean."

60 But Peter said, "Man, I don't know what you're talking about!" Immediately, while he was still speaking, a rooster crowed.

Jesus' words come to fulfillment. Peter has denied knowing Jesus three times. Not in a split second. Like enough time in between each one to think about it. *After a little while, about an hour later.* We don't know what's going on in Peter when

⁴ Matthew 16.21-23

he says it, so there's no use in conjecture. But we DO know what happens next.

61 Then the Lord turned and looked at Peter. So Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times." 62 And he went outside and wept bitterly. -- Luke 22:47-62

He went outside and wept bitterly. He looked eyes with the one he betrayed. And it broke him. He betrayed his friend. He vehemently, convincingly LIED. Multiple times. A repeat offender. Can you relate to Peter AT ALL? You keep spinning the web of lies? Keep digging the hole. Not sure where this path is going to lead? And then...plain and simple. The Lord looked at him. And the gospel announcement is that the Lord looks at you. And says your sin is against him.

Listen, **BOTH Peter and Judas sin against Jesus.** Both of these sins are betrayals. Both of them feel bad about it. Judas was full of remorse. Peter wept bitterly. Both regretted what they did. BUT, right there is where their paths diverge. One of them was consumed by regret and killed himself. Another let regret lead to repentance and found new life and even new ministry on the other side.

There are two ways to respond to your sin today. Be consumed by regret or move on to repentance.

The way of Judas: Consumed by regret, trying to fix it yourself

When Judas felt regret, he tried to fix it himself. And there is a part of this we all applaud right? Hey, he went and tried to make it right. He tried to give the money back. But the Pharisees wouldn't take it. And even if they would have taken it...it wouldn't have changed what he had already done. He had sinned against Jesus. And while giving back the money might be honorable, no amount of restitution could undo what he did. The only thing that could clear his conscience is forgiveness and reconciliation with the very person he betrayed. But instead he just tried to "MAKE UP FOR IT." That is regret consuming him. And eventually it was too much. His sin haunted him. Terrorized him. It became his identity. He couldn't take it.

And man, this is what the enemy does to us with our sin. It becomes our identity. I know it because I see people still trying in their own strength to atone for sins from 20 – 30 years ago. A guy messed up at his job, got fired, and now carries with him this failure label. And works like a dog because he WILL NOT BE A FAILURE AGAIN. HE WILL NOT LET PEOPLE DOWN AGAIN. And I'm not talking about learning from mistakes. I'm talking about your past mistakes consuming you and you are still trying to make up for them. I'm talking about the guy who cheated on his wife and now is consumed by that sin. Like that's his identity. Once a cheater ALWAYS a cheater. So he walks around in this shame and make no mistake he will always be in her debt. He will never be good enough. Because he cheated. That SIN-BASED IDENTITY is SATANIC. It's not Christian. And when Christian friends and spouses and churches continue to look at someone like they were at their lowest point...that's SATANIC

Christianity. That's not the gospel. And it leads to churches that aren't following the Holy Spirit, they aren't evangelizing the lost, because the primary emotion they connect to spiritual things...is regret. The Catholics I know call this catholic guilt. Walk around feeling sorry. That's not repentance. That's just remorse. That's regret. I feel BAD that my actions had negative consequences. That's sadness. There is nothing distinctly Christian about feeling bad that your actions hurt others. That's just regret. Don't think that makes you a Christian. All it means is that you are not a psychopath. The question is what does that regret LEAD YOU TO NEXT. Judas never repented. Never sought forgiveness from Christ. He just tried to fix it himself.

Eventually regret will define you and if you don't do anything about it you will just become totally numb to the things of God or a complete emotional rollercoaster. That's the way of Judas. It's also the way of the world. A world without a concept of new life is a world that gives rise to cancel culture. You did what when you were 8 years old? NO...we cannot trust you now. I don't care how much you say you are sorry or how much you say you've changed. ONCE A RACIST ALWAYS A RACIST. That is the gospel of culture. Don't EVER SIN...And the definition of sin is always changing BUT DON'T EVER DO ANYTHING WRONG. And if you do...THERE IS NO FUTURE FOR YOU. There's an entire cancel industry making sport of hanging people for their sins. They are culture's pharisees and you will never be able to pay them enough silver to satisfy them.

What a wonderful antidote the gospel is to cancel culture.

The apostle Paul was a racist and a murderer. He found new life in Christ. Didn't forget his sin. He was humbled by it. And all the more appreciative of grace. Hang on, let's get to Peter, this will help...

The way of Peter: Let regret move you on to repentance

Like I said...your feeling of regret is human and I would say right. **But it should be a step on the way to the foot of the cross.** See the difference between Peter and Judas was what Christ spoke over Peter.

"32 But I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And you, when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."

When you have turned back. Jesus was always in control. He knew Peter had a hope beyond his sin. And that hope wasn't just...Peter when you weep. No it was Peter when you have turned back. Back where? Back to following Jesus. And right here is the difference between regret and repentance.

Regret causes you to look at you. Repentance causes you to look at Christ.

Regret defines you by what you've done. Repentance defines you by what Christ has done.

Regret says you ARE your sin. Repentance says you WERE dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked. And then it says BUT...**4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love that he had for us, 5 made us alive with Christ**

even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace! -- Ephesians 2:4-5

Regret hears grace but can't receive it because it keeps whispering "But I..." Repentance sees sin and says this is my destiny and then shouts "BUT GOD!"

Judas is absorbed by what HE has done. He should be grieved by his sin yes. But, as the apostle Paul says
10 For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, but worldly grief produces death -- 2 Corinthians 7:10

Repentance means to TURN FROM your sin. Christ died for it. He paid the price. Why are you still walking around with your 30 pieces of silver trying to find somebody you can pay off for your sin? YOU CANNOT pay your sin debt. CHRIST has done it. Your salvation is a gift! And today...today you can walk free. Oh, some of you need the gospel of grace. You started in it, but for a long time now you've been trying to justify yourself in your own strength.

Hear the words of Stuart Townend's hymn. He wrote it in 1995 but you would think it was written by the puritans in the 1600s. He said one of the verses that inspired the hymn was

24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree; so that, having died to sins, we might live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. -- 1 Peter 2:24

Peter – undeserving of new life...man he was healed. Healed. He looked at Christ...and he was healed by the look of love. That said yes you are a sinner. You see it now. But that's why I'm here. To pay your ransom. So that you can be healed. New life. Receive it. The hymn is called How Deep the Father's Love For Us. I'm going to read you the second and third verses and then pray to close us:

Behold the man upon a cross,
My sin upon His shoulders;
Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice
Call out among the scoffers.
It was my sin that held Him there
Until it was accomplished;
His dying breath has brought me life –
I know that it is finished.

I will not boast in anything,
No gifts, no power, no wisdom;
But I will boast in Jesus Christ,
His death and resurrection.
Why should I gain from His reward?
I cannot give an answer;
But this I know with all my heart –
His wounds have paid my ransom.