

“Judas’ Bargain”
(Matthew 26:14-16)

I think that it’s clear by now that the people in Jesus’ day reacted in a variety of ways to Him. Generally, these reactions fell into two categories: they either loved Him, or they hated Him. Last week we saw a woman who loved Him so much that she took something very precious to her and used it to minister to His needs, even though those standing around criticized her for it. This week we see a completely different response on the part of Judas, who will now betray His Lord by making a bargain with the chief priests to hand Him over to them. Throughout the Gospels we see that people had one of these two responses. They may have differed in degree, but they were the same in kind. But why did some love Him and others hate Him? What made the difference? It was the work of the Holy Spirit. Those who had the Spirit of God sovereignly implanted in their hearts by the Father loved Jesus. But those who didn’t have the Spirit didn’t. Children, have you ever wondered why it is that you like certain things that your friends don’t like? Why do you like pickles, but some of your friends don’t like them? Or why do you like baseball, but not all of your friends do – maybe they like some other sport better? The answer is that you have different appetites, desires for different things. There are some things that virtually everyone has an appetite for, like chocolate or vanilla ice cream. But there are other things that only some like, such as spinach or broccoli. Now when it comes to Jesus Christ, the Bible says that not everyone has an appetite or desire for Him. There are those who do, such as the woman we saw last week. And there are those who don’t, such as we will see this morning in Judas. The Spirit is the One who makes the difference.

But now there’s something else we should be aware of from our text this morning, something that should cause us all to do some serious reflecting on our own lives, and that is sometimes those who really don’t desire Jesus are among His disciples. In other words, it’s possible for someone who is not really born again by God’s Spirit to follow Jesus. Now we might ask ourselves, Why? Why would anyone follow Jesus who really doesn’t love Him at all? We know that it can’t be for the right reasons. It must therefore be for the wrong ones. This is one of the things we will want to think about in our passage this morning. The other is this: that even though there are those among Jesus’ disciples who really don’t love Him, yet God even uses these to carry out His will. You might say that this is looking at our text from two different angles or perspectives – the first one is: Why did Judas follow Jesus and then later betray Him from Judas’ perspective? And the second is: What purpose did God have in allowing Judas to follow Jesus for a while and then later to betray Him from God’s perspective? This is what we’ll want to consider this morning.

Let’s consider this first from the human perspective: Why is it that those who don’t love Jesus sometimes seem to follow Him, but then later betray Him? First, we need to see that there are such people. Second, we need to understand why it is that they follow Jesus. And last we need to understand why they later betray Him.

To see that there are such people, all we need to do is consider Judas. Judas was no mere disciple; he was one of the twelve. He was numbered with those who were set

aside by Jesus to be with Him continually. He had even been commissioned by Christ to go out and preach the Gospel, and given the power to work miracles. And yet in spite of all this, he was a stranger to the grace of God. In our text we see him go to the chief priests. He strikes up a deal with them to betray Jesus into their hands. When the deal is made, and he has the money, he begins to look for a good opportunity to fulfill his end of the bargain. Jesus said on an earlier occasion, “Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and *yet* one of you is a devil?” (John 6:70). Judas was an unbeliever. Jesus called him a devil because he shared the devil’s nature. And because he shared his same nature, Judas was also going to share his same judgment. When Jesus was asked by the disciples who it was who would betray Him, He answered, “*It is* one of the twelve, one who dips with Me in the bowl. For the Son of Man *is to* go just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! *It would have been* good for that man if he had not been born” (Mark 14:20-21). It would have been better for Judas not to have been born, because not to exist is far better than having to burn for eternity in the lake of fire. Judas was obviously not a Christian. And yet the strange thing was that he followed the Lord. There were many others who also followed Jesus for a time during His earthly ministry, but yet who fell away when He said something that was too difficult for them, or when He put His finger on something they didn’t want to give up (John 6:66). It is possible for someone to follow Jesus and yet not to be a Christian.

But why would an unbeliever want to do this? As I said, it can’t be for the right reasons. It must therefore be for the wrong reasons. There were many who followed Him because He gave them food. Others wanted Him to free them from the tyranny of Rome. For Judas, it was the money. Jesus and His disciples didn’t have much, but what they had, Judas took. When they weren’t looking, he would steal the money that was in their bag. This is why he objected to the precious perfume being wasted on Jesus. He wanted it sold, so he could take the money (John 12:6). In our passage we see Judas trying to make even more money off of Jesus by seeing how much he can get from the chief priests to betray Him. All he received was thirty pieces of silver – the price for a common slave (Exod. 21:32). That’s not very much when you consider how much it ended up costing him. But this shouldn’t surprise us. There are those who have sold Jesus for much less.

The only reason why any unbeliever ever follows Jesus is for fleshly or sinful gain. It’s not for the true riches. It doesn’t have to be just for money, but often it is. How many people today are getting rich by telling others that Jesus will make them rich? How many sell miracles, and how many more buy them, hoping that Jesus will pay off for them or make them well from their sicknesses? How many follow Him only for a ticket out of hell? There are many who are involved with Christianity today only because of what they hope to gain. That wouldn’t be so bad if what they wanted was holiness or communion with God; but it isn’t. They want something to satisfy their flesh. All their motives are only sinfully self-centered.

But lastly under this point, why do they eventually betray Him? Very simply put, it’s because they can’t get what they want any longer. The profit is gone. When they see that there’s no more hope of gaining anything from Jesus, no money, no health, or they see that they have no hope of security from hell if they’re not willing to take Him on His terms, they desert Him. This may be what Judas did. Thirty pieces of silver was probably a lot more than he would have gained if he had kept stealing from their purse.

So he decided to take the larger amount, and then quit. When the hope of profit is gone, so is the interest.

In light of this, it would be wise for all of us to search our hearts again to find out why it is that we follow Jesus? What is it that we hope to gain? Are we in it for the money? Are we in it for the miraculous healing? Are we looking merely for a ticket out of hell? Do we want to go to heaven for the right reasons? Is the heaven we're striving for the true heaven – a world full of holy love – or is it one of our own making, that appeals to our flesh? What is it that we're hoping to gain by following Jesus? If it's nothing more than what Judas was after, then we're in trouble.

But what is that something more that should be there if our desire to follow Him comes from a gracious heart? It's what I told you at the beginning: a true love and desire for Christ. What is it that makes Christianity attractive to a true Christian? It's Christ. Why does the believer want to embrace Christ? It's because Christ is so lovely. Why does he go to church? It's so he can worship and have communion with Christ. Why does he want to obey Christ? It's because obedience pleases Christ and at the same time makes him more like Christ. Why does the believer want to spend time with other Christians? It's because other Christians are like Christ and draw him nearer to Christ. Why does the believer want to go to heaven? It's because that's where Christ is. Theoretically, if Christ were not in heaven, the believer wouldn't want to go there, because the presence of God and Christ are what make it heaven to the believer. The Christian loves Christ. Jesus is the image of the invisible God. He is God in human flesh, and God is the One whom the Christian longs to see and be with more than anyone or anything else (Luke 14:26).

Brothers and sisters, if this is what's in your heart this morning, then you're a Christian. You're not a Judas. God has poured His Spirit into your heart in a saving way. The fruit of the Spirit is love – love towards God, love towards His Son Jesus Christ, and love towards those who have been recreated in His image. Now certainly we also love the Lord because He has saved us from hell and will bring us to heaven, and because He has promised to take care of all of our needs and heal us according to His will. But we don't love Him only for these things. We love Him mainly for who He is. And we also realize at the same time that being a Christian doesn't mean we're perfect. We still have an appetite for the same things Judas had – for sin – and because we do, we will still sin. But the difference between Judas and us is that we hate our sin and want to get rid of all of it, so that we can be like Jesus. As Christians, we're not perfect. But we have more than Judas or any other unbeliever. We have a love for Christ. It's Christ and His holiness that we want to gain, not the things of this world.

Well, this tells us something as to why people who don't love Jesus sometimes follow Him. The second thing we'll want to look at very briefly is this same thing from God's perspective: What purpose did God have in allowing Judas to follow Jesus for a while and then later to betray Him?

We mustn't forget that this bargain that Judas made didn't happen by accident: it was a part of God's plan, it was to fulfill had been prophesied hundreds of years earlier (John 13:18). Now remember, this doesn't mean that God forced Judas to sin. He didn't put evil in his heart. He only used the evil that was already there and exposed him to the circumstances which would bring about the results He wanted. Judas chose what he freely wanted to do, but God chose to use his choices to bring about what He had freely

planned. God uses the evil actions of men to bring about His good purposes. He not only used Judas, but also the leaders of God's people, to bring about the crucifixion of Christ (Acts 4:27-28). But it was through the crucifixion that He brought about the salvation of a multitude of men and women which no man can number, a group that we are a part of this morning, if we have embraced Jesus Christ in faith and repentance. This was God's good purpose in having Judas follow Christ, so that He could bring about the salvation of His people.

We need to remember that the Lord still uses evil today in the same way – for His good purposes. That's why He allows it to continue to exist. When He's done with it, He will destroy it once and for all. The Lord allows there to be evil in our society, so that He will receive the praise when He saves us out of it, or when He protects us from it, or when He finally brings judgment on this nation for it. He allows wicked men to attack us, so that we will see His wonderful deliverance. He allows this so that it will cause us to grow in our love and trust in Him. He even allows evil to continue in our own hearts to humble us, so that we will trust in Him more and in ourselves less and so that we will eventually become more like His Son Jesus. He uses evil to bring forth good in many different ways. That is why in His absolute control of all things, He allows it to exist. And this is also why we can give the Lord thanks even in the most difficult situations (1 Thes. 5:18). God has ordained the end from the beginning. Nothing that happens in this world happens by accident. The Lord is sovereign over all things, even over evil. And He has promised that He will work all things together for His glory and the good of His church (Rom. 8:28). He used this evil action of Judas to bring about our salvation. He will continue to use the evil that exists today for the good of His church.

And so we've seen why the unbeliever sometimes follows Jesus. From his perspective, it's because he thinks he can gain something more of this world. But from God's perspective, it's so He can use that unbeliever for something good in His overall plan. Of course, we mustn't forget that He also allows the unbeliever to follow His Son, sometimes to bring about that person's conversion. This wasn't why He ordained that Judas follow Him, but it is sometimes the reason why others do. Why are you following Jesus this morning? Is it because you love Him? I hope it is. If it isn't, then I would invite you to take hold of Him this morning. The Lord is able to change a covetous heart into a heart that loves Him. He is able to change a heart of stone into a heart of flesh. Come to Jesus this morning, and ask Him by His Spirit to soften your heart, to take away your desire for worldly things and to fill it with His love. Ask Him to give you the faith to trust in Him. Come to Jesus. He is the One who is able to save your soul. Amen.