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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“BY OUR HANDS? FOR OUR SAKE! JUDAS”
Matthew 26:47-50, 27:1-5; Mark 14:43-46

Why, Judas? Why did you do it?

☠ Was it for the money?

→ {Jn 12:1-4} Six days before your great treachery, Lazarus and his sisters gave a dinner to honor Jesus. Mary took **“a pint of...expensive perfume... poured it on Jesus feet and wiped [them] with her hair.”** You {Jn 12:5} **“objected, ‘Why wasn’t this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year’s wages.’”**

→ According to John 12:6 you said this, **“not ... because [you] cared about the poor but because you were a thief”**: Jesus had appointed you treasurer of the Twelve, and **“as keeper of the money bag, [you] used to help [yourself] to what was put into it.”**

→ A few days later you approached the chief priests and asked, {Mt 26:15} **“What are you willing to give me if I deliver [Jesus] over to you?”** They offered **“thirty pieces of silver”** in trade for the Messiah’s life.

☞ If the betrayal was primarily about money, it was a stunningly selfish act of greed. A man could live in luxury for a long time with that much coin.

■ But you didn’t. You {Mt 27:3-5} returned your blood money, only **“the chief priests and the elders”** would not take it, so you **“threw [it] into the temple and left.”**

☠ Was it for the money? Or was it for the cause?

📖 Your last name is Iscariot. It could stem from Σικαρι (Sicarii). That is the name for extreme Zealots who were confident God had ordained them to destroy the Romans at all costs. They stole Roman supplies, sabotaged Roman infrastructure, burned Roman records, killed Roman soldiers, and assassinated Jews who collaborated with Rome.

The Σικαρι also believed that if they sparked a spiritual revival in Israel and provoked war against the Empire, the Messiah would come forth to lead them and establish his kingdom by means of holy war.

If that describes you, you must have been convinced that Jesus was the Zealot Messiah, until He dashed your hopes – this righteous Jew, this descendant of King David, this miracle-worker who *could* use his power and popularity to purify Israel and crush Rome, but stubbornly refused *not* to.

☞ If the betrayal was primarily about the cause, it was a calculated effort either to compel Jesus to seize the throne or to rid Israel of a false Messiah.

■ But events did not unfold as you planned. In Gethsemane Jesus had one last chance to rally the faithful and unleash the angel armies, yet He allowed himself to be arrested. You recognized your error and pleaded with the priests, {Mt 27:4} **“I have sinned, for I have betrayed an innocent man.”** They retorted, **“What do we care? That’s your problem.”**

☠ Was it for the cause, Judas, or for the devil?

→ Luke reports that shortly after that dinner in Bethany {22:3-6} **“Satan entered”** you. It was then that

you **“went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how [to] betray Jesus.”**

Satan doesn't have a human body and I'm not going to dignify Satan with a gender, so I will call Satan "it".

During the Son's incarnation, Satan attacked him directly. It used every means at its disposal to distract, discourage and deceive Jesus and derail his mission.

When it realized it could not do so it started attacking him indirectly. The Enemy shifted its focus to deluding, wounding and, when possible, destroying us.

→ Do not fear! The devil cannot overcome those who are born of the Father through faith in his Son. We {1 Co 6:19} **“are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in”** us, and {1 Jn 4:4} **“the one who is in [us] is greater than”** Satan, **“who is in the world.”**

But you were not born of the Father, were you Judas? You did not live as temple **“of the Holy Spirit.”** He **“who is greater”** did not dwell in you.

☞ If the betrayal was primarily for Satan it was a hateful, inevitably self-destructive attempt to overthrow the only One who could save you.

■ You realized too late that in betraying Jesus to his enemies, you betrayed yourself to damnation. You {Mt 27:5} **“threw the money into the temple and left. Then [you] went away and hanged [yourself].”**

Why did you do it, Judas? Was it for the money? The cause? The devil? All three?

But why give such a villain this attention? Some would say, “To hell with Judas, and be done with it!”

There are at least two profound reasons to struggle with this question, even if we never arrive at a definitive answer.

🕒 1st, each of us might have been Judas.

→ I am not equating our sins with those of Judas; he was in a class by himself. Nor am I saying that we are in any real danger of sinking to his level; I doubt any of us are anywhere near that. I am simply agreeing with God's Word, which warns {Jer 17:9}: **“The human heart is most deceitful and desperately wicked.**

Who really knows how bad it is?”

→ The good news is, {2 Co 5:17} **“if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come,”** he or she is a new person. **“They are not the same anymore, for the old life is gone. A new life has begun!”**

Assuming we are receiving salvation that is the *real* you, the *real* me. We have been reconciled to God and are born of God. We obey God and love others.

Still, the old man/woman is not quite dead. It will crumble into dust at our death or Jesus' return, which-ever comes first; until then it is clingy as a leech, as tenacious as an addiction, as obstinate as a cancer that is being beaten back but is not yet gone.

Here's the thing: my old man is Judas' brother. Your old woman is Judas' sister. They share his spiritual DNA and are subject to his flaws, frailties, faults and failures. It is not my intent to discourage us! If we are in Christ, God *has* forgiven our guilt. He *is* breaking sin's iron grip on our hearts. He *is* liberating

us for abundant life, *αγαπε* (*agape*) love and joyful obedience to God.

But all this is a gift from God despite us. It is a work of divine mercy and kindness which we do not deserve, cannot earn, and will never repay however righteous we become.

When I look at Judas, it in solemn recognition that, but for the grace of God, there go I. I suggest you do the same.

Each of us is a potential Judas. Let us not be too quick to say, "To hell with him, and be done with it!"

🕒 2nd, Jesus was not eager to condemn Judas.

☑ To quote Dietrich Bonhoeffer from his sermon of March 14, 1937, "**Jesus knew from the very beginning who would betray him.**" Yet, He himself

had called and chosen Judas! And those whom he chose he also loved. He let them participate in his whole life, in the mystery of his person, and ...Judas was in their midst... nowhere is there any suggestion that Jesus secretly hated Judas. Quite the contrary...

■ And then in Gethsemane, how does the Lord respond in Matthew 26:50 when Judas kisses him? He replies, "**Friend, do what you came for.**"

There is not even a hint of sarcasm in Jesus' voice. Judas acts as the enemy – but for his part, Jesus speaks as a friend. {Bonhoeffer} "**Do you hear how Jesus still loves Judas...? Jesus is not yet ready to let Judas go.**"

→ This should come as no surprise. In his Sermon on the Mount Jesus commanded {Mt 5:44} "**love your enemies.**" That is what He is doing here.

→ The Lord's incarnation and ministry were focused on seeking and saving the lost, calling {Lk 5:32} "**sinner to repentance,**" and bringing them into the kingdom. Judas rejected the invitation. He does not have life.

Yet his sin in no way diminished Jesus' love for him! So let us not be too quick to say, "To hell with him, and be done with it!"

☼ That points to the best news of all! God has never given up on us.

→ When we had no power to love him back, Jesus "**died for us sinners.**" No one is likely to give their life even "**for a good person, though someone might be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this:**" "**Christ died for us**" "**while we were still sinners**" (Romans 5:6-8).

→ And get this: "**We were restored to friendship with God by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies**" (Romans 5:10).

Are we tempted to soften that a little? I didn't know God, but I was never his *enemy*; I didn't trust God, but I wasn't his *adversary*.

→ If we believe that, we deceive ourselves, for "**those who live according to the sinful nature**" are "**controlled by the sinful nature**" – and "**the sinful mind is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so**" (Romans 8:5-7).

It was by our hands that {Mt 16:16} “**Christ, the Son of the living God**” was crucified, as surely as if we sold him for thirty pieces of silver. Yet Jesus died for our sake, as surely as He died for Judas.

Why did Judas do it? I am not uncertain.

But I say this with absolute confidence: Jesus, who loved Judas despite his treachery, loves us. He is seeking us, pursuing us, wooing us, and giving himself for us and to us, that we might be saved.

Lord, preserve us!

In your goodness and mercy, grant that no one ever has reason to ask me, Why did you do it? Why did you betray Christ Jesus?