

JOHN 18:1-11
MARK 14:66-72
BETRAYAL

“Jesus ... went out with his disciples across the brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, for Jesus often met there with his disciples. So Judas, having procured a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons. Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, ‘Whom do you seek?’ They answered him, ‘Jesus of Nazareth.’ Jesus said to them, ‘I am he.’ Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, ‘I am he,’ they drew back and fell to the ground. So he asked them again, ‘Whom do you seek?’ And they said, ‘Jesus of Nazareth.’ Jesus answered, ‘I told you that I am he. So, if you seek me, let these men go.’ This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken: ‘Of those whom you gave me I have lost not one.’ Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest’s servant and cut off his right ear. (The servant’s name was Malchus.) So Jesus said to Peter, ‘Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?’” [JOHN 18:1-11]

“As Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came, and seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, ‘You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus.’ But he denied it, saying, ‘I neither know nor understand what you mean.’ And he went out into the gateway and the rooster crowed. And the servant girl saw him and began again to say to the bystanders, ‘This man is one of them.’ But again he denied it. And after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter, ‘Certainly you are one of them, for you are a Galilean.’ But he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, ‘I do not know this man of whom you speak.’ And immediately the rooster crowed a second time. And Peter remembered how Jesus had said to him, ‘Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.’ And he broke down and wept” [MARK 14:66-72].¹

Don and Carol Richardson lived among the Sawi people of Irian Jaya Indonesia. These Stone Age people were head hunters and cannibals, living a life marked by fear and violence. Only one thing could prevent the continual war between the various tribal factions—a *tarop tim*, a Peace Child.² No greater betrayal could be imagined than that one should betray a Peace Child. This was the ultimate betrayal; it would ensure war between those betraying the peace and those betrayed. Observing this cultural ritual, Don Richardson was able to break through the dark veil that obscured the vision of the tribal people to communicate God’s love, evidenced in sending His own Son to be the Peace Child.

Jesus Betrayed! The words speak of one of the darkest sins recorded in the Word of God. Nor should any believer imagine that this event occurred but once, never to be repeated. Tragically, professed followers of the Son of God betray the Saviour on an ongoing basis. Betrayal of the Son of God must lead to one of two conditions—eternal damnation or repentance and restoration to fellowship with God. Either one must be forever condemned, or one will be forgiven and accepted by God. The outcome lies with the one who betrays the Son of God.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible, English Standard Version** © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² The story is recounted in Don Richardson, **Peace Child** (Regal Books, Glendale, CA 1974)

The Bible actually records two betrayals at the time of the Master's Passion. One betrayal resulted in eternal condemnation, the death of the betrayer and the transmutation of the betrayer's name into a term of opprobrium, assuring that Judas will remain marked by ignominy for all time. The other betrayal, perhaps more dishonourable than that of Judas', brought the betrayer to repentance and forgiveness. How did these two betrayals take place? Why did they have such dramatically different results? These questions require answers that will lead us into examining our own relationships to the Master.

JESUS BETRAYED — The redeemed people of God are forever set free from condemnation. Thus freed, they need no longer live in fear—they are assured of acceptance in the Beloved Son and they shall never be rejected when they come into the presence of the True and Living God. It seems strange, incongruous, even bizarre to think that one who has received such a rich gift as the forgiveness of sin and acceptance before the Father would betray the One who redeemed her. However, such does happen. How does it happen?

Perhaps it will assist us in understanding the answer to this question if we will review the steps of each of these individuals who betrayed the Master. Let's look at Judas first. Among the Twelve was an individual named Judas Iscariot. It is fascinating to note that each of the lists of the Twelve names Judas last, usually with the notation that he betrayed Jesus.³ "Iscariot" is an Aramaic word meaning, "Man of Kerioth." Kerioth was a town near Hebron. We know his father was named Simon [see JOHN 6:71; 13:2, 26]. It would appear, therefore, that because he was from Kerioth, Judas was the only disciple to have come from Judea.

Judas became the treasurer—John identifies Judas as the one who "had the moneybag" [JOHN 13:29]. Unfortunately, John also identifies Judas as "a thief" despite "having charge of the moneybag" from which "he used to help himself to what was put into it" [JOHN 12:6]. This presents a disturbing picture of Judas Iscariot. He enjoyed immense respect from the other Apostles; either they permitted him to serve as treasurer or they had elevated him to that position. In either case, he enjoyed considerable respect and had gained stature in the estimate of his peers. However, the fact that he was a thief indicates that he was never redeemed.

I must step aside from the study for a moment. I do not want to leave the impression that one who steals or cheats is necessarily unsaved. However, let there be no mistake, such action denies the profession that Jesus is Lord. Those who are redeemed would not wrong another; they would rather endeavour to work with their own hands to provide for their personal needs. Paul warns all who profess to follow the Master against surrendering to the temptation to steal. "Having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbour, for we are members one of another. Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need" [EPHESIANS 4:24-28].

At another point, when giving instructions concerning what is to be taught, Paul writes, "Bondservants are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour" [TITUS 2:9, 10].

I caution you against imagining that stealing is a little matter with the Lord. I remind you that Peter, the Apostle to the Jews, has cautioned us who believe, "Let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler" [1 PETER 4:15].

³ E.g., MARK 3:19; MATTHEW 10:4; LUKE 6:16; JOHN 18:2, 5

One other dark passage is instructive for any tempted to think stealing is a trifling matter. In the Apocalypse, John writes of the final judgements to be poured out on an unbelieving world. He writes, “The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts” [REVELATION 9:20, 21]. Note especially why those who suffer during the days of the Trumpet Judgements are said to be judged—they are judged for their murders, drug abuse, sexual immorality and thefts! And it would appear that these outrages will be perpetuated against those turning to faith in the Son of God during those dark days!

Judas was a thief; however, his thievery was not what would condemn him—his thievery and greed revealed the state of his heart! Note, however, that his greedy heart appears to have led him into betrayal of the Master. It was during a meal at Bethany when Mary anointed Jesus with a vial of precious nard, as we saw in a previous message;⁴ and Judas was outraged by her generosity. He initiated protests against her extravagance, inducing all the disciples to join him in complaining. According to John, Judas acted as he did out of avarice.⁵

The Gospel accounts leave the impression that when Jesus rebuked the disciples, Judas took umbrage and determined at that moment to betray Jesus. He left the room and went to the chief priests to bargain for betraying Jesus. Luke tells us, “Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve. He went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray him to them. And they were glad, and agreed to give him money. So he consented and sought an opportunity to betray him to them in the absence of a crowd.” [LUKE 22:3-6]. This account agrees with John’s assessment: “During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray him” [JOHN 13:2]. Apparently, Jesus’ rebuke served as an excuse for Judas to surrender to the wicked one.

The chief priests were determined to arrest Jesus and kill Him. Mark, recording Peter’s account, has written, “It was now two days before the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest him by stealth and kill him, for they said, ‘Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar from the people’” [MARK 14:1, 2]. Judas’ approach was the opportunity they needed.

A fuller account of Judas’ final preparation is provided in John’s Gospel. “After [washing the disciples’ feet], Jesus was troubled in his spirit, and testified, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.’ The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he spoke. One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was reclining at table at Jesus’ side, so Simon Peter motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. So that disciple, leaning back against Jesus, said to him, ‘Lord, who is it?’ Jesus answered, ‘It is he to whom I will give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it.’ So when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. Then after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, ‘What you are going to do, do quickly.’ Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. Some thought that, because Judas had the moneybag, Jesus was telling him, ‘Buy what we need for the feast,’ or that he should give something to the poor. So, after receiving the morsel of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night” [JOHN 13:21-30].

⁴ Michael Stark, “Prepared for Burial,” Message preached 10 March, 2013, <http://newbeginningsbaptist.ca/clientimages/42652/sermonarchieve/matthew%2026.06-13%20prepared%20for%20burial.pdf>

⁵ See MATTHEW 26:6-13; MARK 14:3-10; JOHN 12:1-8

Levi provides further insight into this stunning moment when he writes, “As they were eating, [Jesus] said, ‘Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.’ And they were very sorrowful and began to say to him one after another, ‘Is it I, Lord?’ He answered, ‘He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me will betray me. The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.’ Judas, who would betray him, answered, ‘Is it I, Rabbi?’ He said to him, ‘You have said so’” [MATTHEW 26:21-25].

The scene must have been surreal. The questions were likely whispered—no one would have spoken aloud in that atmosphere of shock. The charge that Jesus would be betrayed must surely have left each disciple with a wondering look; their faces must have shown the extent of their stunned disbelief, and their eyes would have revealed questions bubbling up from dark recesses of their minds too troubling to ask openly. At the table was a toxic mix of doubt, fear and astonishment. Though Jesus clearly stated that Judas was the one who would betray Him, none of the rest of the disciples was able to take in the meaning of what the Master said.

This brings us to the text, the eighteenth chapter of John’s Gospel. Judas revealed the place where Jesus was wont to retire for prayer. Arriving at the garden with a band of armed men, he then designated Jesus by greeting Him with a kiss. This would ensure that Jesus, and not another, was seized and haled before the Sanhedrin, which was already assembled, waiting for the appearance of the man they were intent on condemning to death.

Even at this dark moment, Jesus extended mercy to Judas. We read that Jesus responded to Judas’ kiss of betrayal, “Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss” [LUKE 22:48]? The question revealed His compassion as Jesus reached out to the one betraying Him. I can only believe that had Judas repented at this moment, he would have been forgiven.

We can only guess at all the motives driving Judas to betray the Master. We are confident that Satan, taking advantage of his greed, prompted Judas to act as he did. One could suppose that Judas was disappointed that Jesus eschewed a political revolution to enthrone Himself as Prince of Israel. I will suppose that Judas, like other disciples, did believe that Jesus was the promised Messiah. However, Judas appears to have been incapable of seeing beyond a political saviour who would deliver Israel from Gentile domination. That this was the anticipation of the other disciples seems apparent from various passages of the Word.

On one occasion, after a rich, young man had turned away in deep sorrow because he could not surrender his love of wealth, Jesus seized the opportunity to instruct the disciples. He explained how difficult it was for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God. His teaching elicited astonished exclamations from the disciples, to which Jesus replied, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” [MATTHEW 19:26]. At this point, impetuous Peter spoke up, “See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have” [MATTHEW 19:27]. It is obvious that Peter was focused on a political kingdom in which those who allied themselves with the winning side would be rewarded with power and authority.

Shortly after this, we see another instance when it becomes painfully obvious that the disciples were still focused on a political kingdom. “The mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him with her sons, and kneeling before him she asked him for something. And he said to her, ‘What do you want?’ She said to him, ‘Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom.’ Jesus answered, ‘You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?’ They said to him, ‘We are able.’ He said to them, ‘You will drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father’” [MATTHEW 20:20-23].

After His resurrection, walking with Cleopas and another disciple, Jesus heard the sorrowful confession of how hopes for a political kingdom had been dashed by His death. Cleopas spoke with deep disappointment, “We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel” [LUKE 24:21]. Clearly, he had sought, and anticipated, a political kingdom.

Consider one final instance. It was moments before the Ascension when the Son of God would rise into the heavens on a cloud and be taken from their sight. For forty days, Jesus had been teaching the Apostles concerning their mission, preparing them for the coming of the Spirit of God and equipping them to fulfil the tasks of proclaiming the message of life. In these final moments, do they now understand that His will not be a political kingdom? Do they at last “get it?” Are they now prepared to build the Kingdom of God through proclaiming the message of life? How will they respond to the charge they are about to receive? The disciples asked Jesus, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel” [ACTS 1:6]?

Therefore, in his desire for political relief, Judas did not differ from the other disciples. The fact that Judas was anticipating a political kingdom is not a fault that should be held against him. However, the fact that he had permitted himself to become so focused on that political kingdom that he was prepared to betray Jesus is a serious sin. It is a caution to Christians today. Though politics can be important, one must guard against permitting any desire to have a sound political system overwhelm one’s commitment to the Kingdom of God.

Perhaps, as suggested by some modern musical productions and even as advocated on occasion by supposed theologians, Judas actually imagined that he could somehow coerce the Master into removing the Romans from the land through compelling Him to act. I personally believe that such speculation wildly misses the mark; no one should give the betrayer a pass. Whatever his motives, he opened himself to Satan through his greed. Similarly, whenever one is overtaken in a sin, they allow the wicked one an opening.

I do want to suggest some truths worthy of consideration, and especially so we understand who Judas actually was. We should not doubt the sincerity of Jesus’ call to Judas. At the beginning, Jesus viewed Judas as a potential follower and disciple. The Master had said, “Many are called, but few are chosen” [MATTHEW 22:14]. We dare not impugn Jesus’ sincerity in calling Judas; no other supposition does justice to the Master’s character or to His repeated appeals to Judas. Just so, not every church member is redeemed; many are religious, though lost. Not every supposed Christian has been saved; only those who are born from above through faith in the Son of God are saved.

Neither must we fall into the trap of imagining the Jesus’ foreknowledge implies foreordination. Judas was not chosen to be a traitor; he bears responsibility for his own choices, just as every individual who has rejected the Master must bear responsibility for her or his own choice. Judas’ guilt was on his own head. Though the Master knew who would betray Him [JOHN 13:11], we must not imagine that Judas was therefore innocent.

Finally, it is important to note that Judas was never really Jesus’ man. He was an Apostle, it is true, but he never had a relationship with Jesus. The highest title he is ever noted to have used of Jesus was “Rabbi” [MATTHEW 26:25], never “Lord.” Again, just because one is a preacher or a church leader does not mean they are redeemed.

Ultimately, Judas betrayed Jesus because he put his own desires ahead of God’s desires. Jesus had taught, and Judas had no doubt heard the Master when He spoke these truths, “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” [MATTHEW 6:33]. Your needs will be supplied if you seek the Kingdom of God. We tend to confuse our needs with our wants; but the truth that He spoke remains unchanged.

Let me focus attention on another individual who betrayed Jesus during His Passion. Peter had vowed to stand with Jesus, no matter what. You will undoubtedly remember the incident after Jesus had instituted the ordinance of “The Lord’s Table” which we observe to this day. Jesus had spoken to the disciples yet again of His Passion. The Word records Jesus’ statement, “You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’ But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.” Having said this, Peter blustered, “Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away.” His bluster elicited this cautionary statement from the Master, “Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.” At this, Peter boasted, “Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!” I don’t want to be too harsh on Peter; after all, the divine text reads, “And all the disciples said the same” [MATTHEW 26:31-35].

When Jesus was seized and brought into the high priest’s house, we read that Peter followed at a distance. Walking in the darkness, trying to make out the flickering shadows cast by the dancing flames of the torches that were carried by those who had taken Jesus, Peter must have felt rage at the thought that Jesus was arrested and that he had been powerless to stop the wicked acts of these men. He was no doubt conflicted—at once angry, hurt and undoubtedly he felt great fear, his fear arising from his desire to do something but not knowing what he should do. So he followed the posse that had arrested the Master, stepping carefully so as not to draw attention to himself while yet observing where these men were going and what they were going to do. Ultimately, he stopped when they had entered the high priest’s house. Tentatively, even gingerly, Peter would have stepped out of the shadows to enter the courtyard.

Standing outside in the courtyard, Peter saw that some of those who were drawn by the raucous noise had built a fire. Let’s pick up the divine account at this point. “When they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them. Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, ‘This man also was with him.’ But he denied it, saying, ‘Woman, I do not know him.’ And a little later someone else saw him and said, ‘You also are one of them.’ But Peter said, ‘Man, I am not.’ And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, ‘Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean.’ But Peter said, ‘Man, I do not know what you are talking about.’ And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, ‘Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.’ And he went out and wept bitterly” [LUKE 22:55-62].

I wish the account was a sterile as I’ve just read it. Peter had no doubt entered into conversation with those about the fire; perhaps his words were limited, but it was nevertheless sufficient to betray his roots. When he opened his mouth, it was obvious that he was from Galilee—his accent betrayed him. To emphasise his lack of connection to Jesus, Peter swore his innocence with an oath. This is what Mark, serving as Peter’s amanuensis, writes, “[Peter] began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, ‘I do not know this man of whom you speak’” [MARK 14:71]. He blasphemed; he invoked the Name of God to verify that he did not know anyone named Jesus. It is unclear whether Peter called down a curse on himself should he be lying, or whether he uttered imprecations against the man named Jesus of whom those about the fire spoke. The swearing and cursing are not like profanities and crudities used in modern culture; Peter was calling God to witness his veracity and swearing by things thought to be holy that he was speaking truthfully. Tragically, he was lying the entire time. Peter betrayed Jesus by refusing to stand firm in acknowledging Him as Lord.

Peter's motive was self-preservation. Focused on his own interests, he was incapable of considering what the will of God might be. In another instance, when Jesus called Peter to begin walking on the raging sea, he stepped out of the boat and was actually walking atop the waves, until he took his eyes off the Master. At that point, he began to sink [see MATTHEW 14:28-33]. Jesus reached out His hand and took hold of Peter, saying, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" In similar fashion, so long as Peter sought the Master rather than warming himself by the fire, he was relatively safe. Focused on his immediate "felt need," Peter was not thinking of the things of God. He was in the same, unenviable position he had occupied on another occasion when Jesus had rebuked him, saying, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man" [MATTHEW 16:23].

Something like that happens to us too often. Caught up in the dull routine of daily life, absorbed in pursuing our own desires, the pressure to conform grows intense and we focus on doing our job, on advancing ourselves, on acquiring some new toy, on making ourselves look better than we feel, on anything and everything other than the will of God. Increasingly, Christians neglect beginning the day by reading the Word or with prayer. Perhaps that could account for the dreary reports of defeated believers. We are not thinking of Christ, and we are certainly not thinking of His will for our lives, when suddenly we find ourselves next to the warm glow of some secular fire. The conversation is rough and the language grows coarse; someone says, "You're one of His followers," and you demure, or you make light of the accusation. This continues until you call down imprecations and betray the Master.

The point is, we permit ourselves to enter into the darkened world without fortifying ourselves with the Word or without equipping ourselves to stand through seeking the will of the Master. The cold night wind chills us and we seek a little warmth, even if it is the faux glow of the world's flames. We have set ourselves up for denial. None of us can say that we are immune to precisely such a scenario as I have just described; even great Christians have succumbed to the temptation to deny the Master.

I wish I could say that we are strong enough to avoid succumbing to fear, to argue that we will never deny the Master or that we will never betray Him. However, I know the human heart. Jeremiah spoke a dark truth when he said of the heart,

"The human mind is more deceitful than anything else.
It is incurably bad. Who can understand it?"

[JEREMIAH 17:9]⁶

For all our boasting about our desire to stand strong in the face of adversity, for all our bold statements that we will stand courageously, in our own strength we will fail miserably when the enemy roars. Ultimately, we are but sheep; we are not brave. The Apostle to the Gentiles cautions, "Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall" [1 CORINTHIANS 10:12]. Christians will do well to heed his warning.

BETRAYERS BETRAYED — Frankly, I would suppose that every Christian to whom I speak this day has at some point wept bitter tears, knowing that she or he has betrayed the Master. If you have not been so broken, it is quite likely that such will happen too soon. It is a good thing to know that one is broken, to recognise that one has sinned through betraying the Master. What we do when we realise we have sinned is more important than perhaps even we can understand.

⁶ The NET Bible First Edition (Biblical Studies Press, 1996-2006)

Consider that either of these men who betrayed the Master experienced remorse. One, Judas, never moved beyond regret. Of him, we read a sad commentary in Matthew's Gospel. "When Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, saying, 'I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.' They said, 'What is that to us? See to it yourself.' And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself" [MATTHEW 27:3-5]. Judas was seized with remorse, he clearly regretted his action. Older translations of the Bible state that he "repented himself,"⁷ a translation that is liable to misunderstanding in contemporary vernacular. It is obvious that there was no repentance toward God in Judas' actions, though he did feel regret.

May I say that sinners frequently feel remorse when they are caught in their sin. After the fact, they regret their choices. Drunkards promise never to touch a drop of alcohol again on the morning after they have thrown a drunk. The junkie hates her need for just one more fix and the fact that she will do anything to find the transient and increasingly elusive high. The adulterer promises to be faithful after every fling, as does the one who cannot stop viewing pornography. Few prisoners incarcerated in our jails rejoice that they were caught and held accountable for their crimes. All alike feel remorse and regret their actions or at least regret the consequences of their choices; but regret and remorse can never change anything. So, Judas, filled with remorse, wanted to undo the evil he had done. However, undoing our sin is impossible. When we have sinned against God, we cannot simply wish away the consequences of our choices. Judas compounded his wickedness by taking his own life. Unable to face the consequences of his action, he hanged himself.

We have recorded an addition, stygian piece of information concerning Judas' death. When considering the election of one to take Judas' place, Peter spoke of Judas. The account is provided in the early pages of the Book of Acts. "Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. For he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry." (Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness, and falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. And it became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their own language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) "For it is written in the Book of Psalms,

"May his camp become desolate,
and let there be no one to dwell in it';

and

"Let another take his office."

[ACTS 1:16-20]

The Word informs us that Judas hung himself from a tree that overhung an escarpment. It would appear that he did not actually die from the hanging; rather, he fell and died from the fall. Perhaps the rope was not strong enough to hold his body and the cord broke, or possibly the ligature came untied and dropped him. In any case, his body fell from some distance, smashing his body open and ultimately killing him. Undoubtedly, Judas died an agonising, pitiful death.

⁷ See **KJV** or **ASV**

There is a sad epitaph recorded of his self-centred choice. “The chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, ‘It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is blood money.’ So they took counsel and bought with them the potter’s field as a burial place for strangers. Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. Then was fulfilled what had been spoken by the prophet Jeremiah, saying, ‘And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him on whom a price had been set by some of the sons of Israel, and they gave them for the potter’s field, as the Lord directed me’” [MATTHEW 27:6-10].

Ever so scrupulous, the religious leaders would not accept the money thrown back into the Temple—it was “blood money,” and thus unclean. They seem oblivious to the fact that their hands are dripping blood by their own wicked actions, yet they are icily precise in avoiding any ritual contamination by accepting “blood money” into the treasury.

So, Judas’ legacy is a place that would afterward be known as “The Field of Blood.” There, strangers and the indigent would be buried. Judas died without a place even to be buried, and his legacy would forever be this sombre place with such a gloomy name.

What of the other man who betrayed Jesus, first through silence and then through denial that he had any knowledge of him? What happened to Peter? When he realised the accuracy of Jesus’ prophecy, we read that Peter “broke down and wept” [MARK 14:72]. The Word leaves the impression that even as he fled from the courtyard and in the presence of those who had challenged him, hot tears were flooding down his cheeks and great sobs began to rack his body. Remorse! Regret! Undoubtedly, Peter felt remorse and regret. However, we can be certain that Peter was experiencing “godly grief” that “produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret” [2 CORINTHIANS 7:10].

Mark’s Gospel represents Peter’s account of Jesus’ life and ministry. In the final chapter we read a wonderful statement. The women who went to the tomb to honour Jesus’ body, found the empty tomb and an angel seated in the tomb. Though they were frightened by what they witnessed, they heard his words, “Go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you” [MARK 16:7]. Tell Peter that Jesus is risen.

Peter appears to have absented himself from the other disciples; he was ashamed of his failure, he was a nobody. If Peter was to be restored, it would be necessary that he be restored by the Risen Master Himself. The other disciples couldn’t restore Peter, nor could Peter push himself forward. Jesus would have to do this otherwise impossible task. So, the angel specifically instructed the women to tell Peter.

Peter had again associated himself with some of the disciples; he was still influential among them, and when he declared that he was returning to his trade as a fisherman, they joined him in the endeavour. However, Jesus wasn’t finished with Peter, or with the other disciples, for that matter. Jesus appeared to them as they were fishing and called them to the shore. I want you to take note of the account that is provided as Jesus restores Peter to service.

“Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ He said to him, ‘Feed my lambs.’ He said to him a second time, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me?’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ He said to him, ‘Tend my sheep.’ He said to him the third time, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me?’ Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, ‘Do you love me?’ and he said to him, ‘Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.’ Jesus said to him, Feed my sheep” [JOHN 21:15-17]. What is vital, though often neglected, is the call with which Jesus concluded the restoration of Peter: “Follow me” [JOHN 21:19]. With this, Peter’s repentance was complete; he was restored to fellowship with the Master.

I may be speaking to one today who has betrayed the Master. You no doubt feel deep shame at your betrayal. You perhaps wonder if you can ever again be useful to the Master. You know that you can no longer trust your own strength and you question whether you will ever again serve Him with distinction. Naysayers have tried to discourage you with an old bromide, “The bird with a broken wing will never fly as high.” Let me say that you are not a bird—you are a child of the True and Living God if you have faith in the Son of God. When you are restored, you will again serve.

Turning in repentance, we may anticipate restoration. When Elijah was broken, his greatest service still lay in the future. He would anoint one to replace him—one who would appoint kings and who would double his miracles. In the same way, Peter’s greatest service was still ahead.

One Southern Gospel hymn that should encourage the one who believes himself broken through betrayal is entitled “I’m Flying Higher Than I’ve Ever Been.” The song begins by speaking of this old saw that the bird with a broken wing can never fly high anymore. It speaks of one who fell by the wayside, broken and bruised; it speaks of one who is vulnerable to Satan because he was so grievously wounded. The chorus contains these words:

Higher than I’ve ever been
Higher than yesterday’s sin
Where eagles can’t soar
I can see heaven’s door
I’m flying higher than I’ve ever been.

Where eagles can’t soar
I can see heaven’s door
I’m flying higher than I’ve ever been.

If I’ve spoken to one who cycles through regret because you have no victory over your sin, know that your great need is to submit to Christ as Master over your life. You stand in greatest peril, even now. However, in Him you will find forgiveness and life and power to be victorious over sin.

If I’ve spoken to one who knows Jesus as Master, but somehow you have tried to stand in your own strength only to fail miserably, know that the Master even now seeks you to restore you in His service. The Word encourages each of us when it says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” [1 JOHN 1:9]. Confess your sin, return to the Master and He will return to you. Amen.