

March 22, 2015

THE REMORSE

Matthew 27:1-10

Peter was weeping. Stumbling towards...what? He was going to find the others, the ones who had run away. Where could they be? Would they have regrouped back at the Mount of Olives? We know they got together again, at least by Sunday morning. I imagine that none of them had slept since Jesus was arrested. They probably felt afraid for their lives! Some of them may have fled together in the same direction. Maybe it would have been safest if they all separated. But sometimes you just need to be with a few familiar faces, some friendly presence, when a crisis occurs. Some have suggested that they all eventually rallied together at the home of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha. That's in Bethany, a short walk from Gethsemane. Some have suggested that Lazarus owned the olive grove on the Mount of Olives. Whatever and however things happened, they eventually regrouped, though at least by the afternoon John had gone to the site of the Crucifixion, according to his Gospel. Meanwhile, Jesus was being taken to Pontius Pilate. They, the Chief Priests and the Elders, "*conferred together against Jesus in order to bring about His death.*" (27:1) They were bound and determined to silence Jesus, primarily because He had revealed their falsehood, exposed their hypocrisy, uncovered their error!

The Disciples, however, all regrouped except for one: Judas. The sun would soon begin to rise. The darkness would disburse. People would begin to see more clearly soon, Or would they? Maybe there was a bit of a haze beginning to rise.

Judas felt as if he'd made a huge mistake. Judas may have been nearby, watching the trial, too. If he was, he did a better job than Peter of going unnoticed. Somehow, he was aware that Jesus had been condemned. Did he know that Jesus said almost nothing during His trial? Did Judas expect to see Jesus appeal for the angels to come, a warrior-spirit to rise in Jesus, and a battle to begin? And then when it didn't, he felt as if he'd betrayed Jesus to death, rather than incite the Messiah to begin to take control and wield His power, to rise to victory.

"*He repented!*" (v. 3) Judas knew he was wrong. He wanted to turn things around. Because there had been a conspiracy, and Judas was embroiled in the center of it, he went back to the main conspirators. Not many of them went with the guards as Jesus was taken to Pilate, so the Sanhedrin was still informally gathered. Several of them, probably most of them, actually, went to the Temple. It was the Day of Passover, the holiest of days to the Jews. They had to prepare. That's where Judas went. That's where forgiveness and reconciliation could be found...The Temple.

He "*brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the Chief Priests and the Elders.*" He was contrite and full of remorse. He confessed: "*I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.*" (v. 4a)

In Deuteronomy 27:24, it says, "*Cursed be anyone who takes a bribe to shed innocent blood.*" Maybe Judas knew that what he did was an accursed thing. The Chief priests and the Elders were part of it. They paid the bribe. They were sinners by association in the conspiracy. They had done an accursed thing. But they were also the only ones who could absolve Judas. Instead, they said, "*What is that to us? See to it yourself!*" (v. 4b) Rather than prescribe any form of penance, rather than express any compassion, rather than do the kindest part of their job, these religious leaders were cold and harsh. Judas was just a tool to them. They didn't care about him. He'd served his purpose. They could have discarded trash less carelessly.

Judas saw their nature, their dark hearts, their puny resentment of his Rabbi. Judas believed in Jesus. But his belief was distorted by his twisted expectations. Maybe he knew this now. But he also knew that all the Chief Priests and the Elders cared about was getting Jesus out of the way. Judas may never have realized that anything he did was fulfilling prophecy, and, very obviously, neither did these religious leaders.

Anger was welling up inside of Judas. His co-conspirators were turning their backs on him. He threw down the thirty pieces of silver to the Temple floor and left. (v. 5) Where could he go. His fellow disciples knew what he'd done. He began to hate himself. He had betrayed Jesus. He had been rejected by the Chief Priests and Elders. He was lost. Self-loathing was churning away in his mind. Like Peter, his heart was broken. But Judas had had a role in breaking Jesus. The thought couldn't get out of his mind. Like a hot, sharp knife stabbing into his brain, he couldn't escape himself.

Meanwhile, Jesus is being taken before Pilate. The chief Priests and Elders at the Temple began a casual conversation about what to do with the thirty pieces of silver. How was their discussion made known to Matthew? Could it have been overheard by a Temple servant who, after the Resurrection, maybe even after the Day of Pentecost, shared it with the Disciples? Could it have come from one of the Elders who later became a believer? Some people do realize that there are mistakes they have made, and they try to overcome them, especially when they finally see the light.

But these Chief Priests and Elders admitted among themselves that the thirty pieces of silver were "*blood money*." It couldn't go into the Temple Treasury. They decided to put the money to a good cause....to assuage their own guilt? They would buy (after the Passover) a "*potter's field as a place to bury foreigners*." (v. 7) More likely, a place to bury slaves. Thirty shekels of silver was the price of a slave. (Exodus 21:32)

By now, the Day of Passover was beginning to be filled with activity,. Lambs were being brought to the Temple, families were gathering together, Jesus was standing before Pilate, and Judas tied a robe around his neck to hang himself. His remorse had dug into his heart like a dull nail. His self-loathing made him think that this was his only escape. He felt as if he could never rise above the guilt of his betrayal. Any light in his life was only further exposing the darkness of his deed. Echoing in his mind are the last words Jesus had said to him: "*Friend, do what you are here to do.*" (26:50) **Friend!**? Judas failed as a friend. Judas could see no way forward. He felt only torment. Maybe he even felt as though he didn't deserve to live. His death would be his entrance into eternal torment....maybe.... Judas had repented. He had confessed his sin. Could he leave the world a sign of his remorse, his contrition? Could his death tell others not to do what he had done? Or is Judas only a pathetic pawn that served a plan greater than he ever knew?

I think the world needs this sign of remorse, and the message of the wrongness of betrayal. But will the world get the whole message? The message of Peter's life? The message that you *can* rise above your denials and short-comings in life, and take on the blessing of forgiveness, the healing that is the Resurrection, the power that is the spirit of faith. If you ever feel remorse for your sins, the answer is never suicide. We all need to seek the Lord while He may be found!

I pity Judas. Not because I like him or admire him, but because he is just so pitiful. Might he be included in Jesus first prayer from the Cross: "*Father, forgive them for they know not what they do?*"

Heaven help us all!