

"Were You There When Jesus Was Betrayed?"—Matthew 26:47-50

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, "Were You There When Jesus Was Betrayed?", is Matthew 26:47-50 → *While Jesus was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a great crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The One I will kiss is the man; seize Him." And he came up to Jesus at once and said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" And he kissed Him. Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you came to do." Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and seized Him.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

The desire to share our life experiences with others is natural, whether those experiences are good or bad. However, it's interesting how many times we share our excitement from an experience and end up being frustrated. As you share, many times it seems like the other person just isn't getting excited about it with you. Since it is natural for you to want others to share with you in the joy of your positive experiences, it may be so frustrating that you want to say: "I guess you just had to be there!"

Being physically present is much different than experiencing something through the eyes of another person. During our Lenten vespers we will be considering the question: “Were you there . . .?” in connection with accounts of Jesus’ passion. While none of us were eye witnesses of Jesus suffering and dying on the cross there is a sense in which we were there every step of the way. As we look at the account of who was there when Jesus was betrayed, in one sense we can see our presence.

One of the key persons who was there was *Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve* disciples of Jesus. According to John 12:6, Judas was the “treasurer” for *the twelve*, but *he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it*. He apparently struggled with idolatry in the form of greed and theft. In the midst of such idolatry satan got a foothold, tempting him to betray His Lord and Savior for thirty pieces of silver—a temptation Judas chose to follow. (cf. Matthew 26:14-16; Luke 22:3-6)

Others who were present when Jesus was betrayed were *a great crowd with swords and clubs*, ready to seize Jesus even if it meant a fight. Notice these people were sent *from the chief priests and the elders of the people*, acting on behalf of the religious leaders’ efforts to get rid of Jesus. John 18:3 says this *great crowd with swords and clubs* were *a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the*

Pharisees. Since this group of religious leaders made up the Jewish ruling council in Jerusalem (called the Sanhedrin) they had access to soldiers who would do their bidding. At the same time, the Scriptures seem to describe this *crowd* as kind of a mob working as “puppets” of the Sanhedrin, many of whom may not have really known why they were there. (cf. Acts 19:32) Being there in the midst of such excitement and high emotion can lead to very irrational behavior.

As Jesus faced His betrayer we also hear about the presence of His other disciples who were ready to fight. John 18:10 says, *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.)* Luke's account tells us that Jesus stopped them *and He touched Malchus' ear and healed him.* (cf. Luke 22:51) In their zeal to protect Jesus they discovered that Jesus' purpose was much different than their own understanding of His Person & Work.

Were you there when Jesus was betrayed? In many respects you were there. You can see your presence in the actions of those involved in His betrayal. For instance, we can see our own sin in *Judas*. While you may not see yourself betraying Jesus in the same manner Judas did, it can happen in other ways. What would you do for money? Idolatry and greed in the midst of materialism provides a strong temptation for you to “betray” your Savior by using others for financial gain rather than

loving them or when you allow money to be that which defines your relationships rather the Scriptures. Jesus allowed Scripture to define how He functioned in His relationships.

Can you see yourself in the *crowd*? Throughout the ordeal of Jesus' "arrest" in the Garden of Gethsemane, His mock trials before the Sanhedrin and Pilate, as well as His crucifixion, betrayal is evident. How tempting to betray your Lord by "following the crowd" in its sinful ways and attitudes, compromising the authority of His Word in your life. This happens far too often when Christians take on explanations of sin by human rationalizations and concepts. When the subjective analysis to justify sin trumps God's written Word then betrayal of the Savior has taken place.

Can you see yourself in *the disciples* with Jesus? Frail sinners who didn't understand the full impact of the events which were happening. With their focus on an earthly kingdom led by Jesus they were ready to stand up and fight for Him . . . or rather fight for **what they mistakenly thought was important to Him . . .** and that only to a point. How easy is it for us to stand up for Jesus when it's on our own terms rather than on His terms. Ultimately *all the disciples left Him and fled* when He told them this was taking place in order *that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled*. (cf. Matthew 26:56) Clinging to a Biblical principle may be easy when around those who are like-minded. But it becomes a huge

challenge when family, friends, co-workers and others are striving to get you to think differently.

As you see yourself in each of these personalities present when Jesus was betrayed, it is imperative that you see yourself in light of the most important person Who was there—Jesus. Jesus was the most properly focused person in this scene because He had His heart set on dealing with the sin of all those sinners who were there and, no matter what their motives or perceptions, **He was going to do so in God's way!** In Matthew 26:53-54 Jesus said: *Do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once send Me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so? What Scriptures?* During the Passover meal prior to this incident in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus predicted their abandoning Him based upon Zechariah 13:7 → *Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.* That's exactly what happened.

However, Jesus came to be the sinner's Substitute in connection with fulfilling *the Scriptures* of Isaiah 53:4-6 → *Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; **and the***

LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. Jesus was betrayed into the hands of these sinners to save **all** of us sinners.

When you focus on Jesus, Who was there betrayed for you, you can see your sin of betrayal in the light of Jesus' faithfulness in submission to the Scriptures for your forgiveness and salvation. It brings you to recognize that you were there when Jesus was betrayed because Jesus allowed it to happen for you. It was another step toward the cross where Yahweh *laid on Him* your iniquities and sins. It was *the chastisement that brought you peace* with God as He took the punishment which your sins deserved upon Himself. It moves you in repentance and faith to confess, *all we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way* so you can be completely forgiven of all your sins! You were there because while Jesus was undergoing betrayal you were on His mind and in His heart. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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