

John And Anti-John, the beginning and end of Jesus' earthly ministry

Scripture: Matt 26:14-25, 45-56

Sunday, April 9, 2017

Palm Sunday is the day when the church all over the world celebrates Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Three years ago when Jesus was first connecting with his disciples only a handful of people had recognized him as the messiah. On Palm Sunday finally, the whole nation finally had. If this was the US Presidential election you can call it the day, he had the highest numbers on the polls. The crowds were going crazy, after waiting for so many years, finally someone who would save them is finally here. Not only that, there were other times in Jesus' ministry that people tried to crown him and make him King. And Jesus did a kind of disappearing act that even our best magicians have been able to replicate. So what happened this time? Jesus was ready, the crowds were ready. Then just a couple days later the crowds were baying for his crucifixion. And the one person who made that happen, Judas Iscariot and his actions we are going to look at today.

But before we go there, let's take a quick recap of how Jesus' ministry got off the ground. Well, it was all the result of a fellow called John the Baptist. And John the Baptist's task was 3 fold, to prepare the people for the Messiah, to detect the Messiah and when he detected the Messiah, he would announce the Messiah to everyone. And the characteristics that enabled him to do this job was the fact that he was supremely humble, he wanted no followers for himself and he never forgot his mission which was to point people to Jesus Christ. And because John the Baptist did what he did, Jesus Christ could officially launch his ministry. Fast forward the story by 3 years and you get a very different kind of disciple, Judas Iscariot. Now Judas Iscariot had the job of the

treasurer of the group. And he was the most unreliable and unfaithful treasurer because he was taking money from the bag for his own purposes all along. So in a sense he was betraying Jesus all along. Because the question that was driving Judas all along was “what is in it for me?”. I am sure he did not start stealing money when he first got the treasurer job. Because when Judas first got the job he was thinking that Jesus would be the new king and by being with Jesus at this stage he had a lot to gain from it. However as time passed, he started getting disillusioned with Jesus’ approach to power and everything that comes with it. You see Jesus did not seem to care for earthly power. So if Jesus did not aim for earthly power, he is not going to get it. If Jesus does not get it, then he as a disciple is not going to get any, and that would mean that all his time following Jesus has been a waste. If that is the case, what is he to do. If you are not going to get the big rewards later on, then might as well get the small rewards you get now. Right? So he decided to pinch a few coins here and there. But when you pinch a few coins, it makes you thirsty for more. So he began to think in his mind, how can I get something really significant out of following Jesus and not just a few coins here and there. And that is when he started to make his bigger financial plans.

Now you may ask the question, if Judas was expecting to ride the coattails of Jesus’ rise to power, why does he do this just after Jesus seems to be doing just that, riding into Jerusalem as the Messianic figure everyone was waiting for, for centuries. You see this is where you see Judas’ cynicism had completely taken over. Because by this time, even though most of the ordinary people were seeing Jesus as the one they had waited for a long time, Judas did not think he would be the kind of King that would benefit him personally. And he did not want to be at the mercy of Jesus, and wait and see that lucrative position he could eventually land in the court of Jesus. He wanted more control on his own life and his own benefits. So if I sell Jesus out, I know what I will get for myself and I will get it now as opposed to waiting for some undetermined future reward. Why wait when you can get your money now right? He wanted to be the one

who was making the deal and he wanted to payout now so he determines in his mind that he is going to look for a buyer who would pay him the best price for handing over Jesus. So he does.

While all this was going on in Judas' mind, the priests in the temple were looking for a way to quietly capture Jesus and kill him when Passover was done. So Judas goes over to the temple and makes a deal. I will point out to you who the Jesus is. In fact, I will greet Jesus with a kiss. Then you know what to do. What will you give me if I can point Jesus out for you? Well, apparently the priests thing 30 pieces of silver is what they can offer. Judas things it is a great deal and off he goes. The big day arrives, Jesus spends the Passover with him and he even points out to the disciples who his betrayer was going to be. Before we get ahead, I know you may be asking what's the deal with a betrayer. Why do you even need a betrayer, right? The whole city just watched Jesus ride in on a donkey. It is not like he was going about incognito like some Columbian drug Lord. Why do you need someone to point him out? Why you have to remember that this was before the days of television. So just because someone was a celebrity, and you had heard about this person, it did not mean you knew how they looked. So especially for such a high value target like Jesus who had given the Pharisees the slip many times before, you needed definitive proof that you had indeed you had the right person. And the one doing the arresting would be regular soldiers and they may never have seen Jesus before. So the only way to authenticate that they had the right target was to get an authentication from someone who was the closest to Jesus. Someone from his inner circle. You see, this is a big deal. It takes someone from Jesus' inner most circle to give him away. There was no other way for the authorities to catch Jesus, before the era of photography and television and DNA testing. And Judas, who was part of the inner circle was willing to be the one who pointed Jesus out to the authorities.

Before I go on, I want to draw your attention to this phenomena that happens at the book ends of Jesus ministry. You see Jesus would not have been able to start his ministry, if you did not have someone with the right level of spiritual authority to point out to Jesus and inform the people that he was the Messiah they were waiting for. And Jesus' earthly ministry was terminated because one of his disciples who had the right level of proximity to Jesus sold him to the authorities. Judas if you thing about it was the exact opposite of the Baptist. He was worldly, selfish and a completely conditional follower of Jesus.

Why do I point all this out to you? I think Judas like behavior can creep into any disciple. All of us will be tempted to betray our Lord all the time. And unless we are aware of these temptations and are conscious of avoiding them you and I will fall you. Now I believe there are three ways we can betray our Lord. We can betray our Lord by our values we live by, we can betray our witness and we can betray a fellow disciple. Let me elaborate.

The first way we can betray our Lord is by our values. You see the disciple of Jesus is expected to have the values of Jesus. And the values are well encapsulated in the fruits of the spirit. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and long suffering. Each of these values will be tested to the limit of the capacity that God deems appropriate. And with each of these we have an option to stay true to the Holy Spirit or betray the Holy Spirit. I want to clarify that I am not talking about the unforgivable sin here. But within the range of forgivable sins, there is quite a scope. I am very patient with people around me but sometimes when my children don't do what they are supposed to do, my patience runs out pretty quickly. It is easy to be at peace when everything is going well but when somebody gets violent with you how much of your peace can you still hold on to. It may be difficult but we cannot afford to betray our values because when we betray our values we are betraying the Christ in us.

The second way we can betray Christ I believe is by betraying our witness. This is the next level to our values but to give you an idea of what I am talking about, imagine you have been given an opportunity to have a deep spiritual conversation with someone who does not know Christ. Maybe Christ did something amazing in your life, maybe he healed you of something or gave you a job or a life partner. And when you talk to this person you talk about everything else but the fact that Jesus Christ healed you or gave you something you asked Him for. That is a betrayal of witness. If you and I are disciples of Christ, our assignment is to be a witness to him at all times. And in every conversation we need to be praying about how we can be a witness to our Lord who is active in and around us in a very personal way. As a disciple we all have to be mindful of not betraying our witness to our Lord.

The third way we can betray Christ is by betraying a fellow disciple of Christ. This is closest to what Judas did. In some countries where extreme persecution takes place this is something the believers have to be aware of all the time. The famous Chinese evangelist Brother Yun earned his nickname Heavenly Man because one night when he was being interrogated and tortured to reveal his true name. He knew he could never tell them his true name because that will enable the authorities to trace all the other believers who were connected to him. So in spite of a whole night of beating he would only answer, my name is the heavenly man. Now people outside could hear him screaming this all night and that name stuck. Heavenly Man. Well you and I may not be subject to physical torture, but even we have opportunities to betray our fellow believers like this. Imagine you are a team and you are working in the secular world building relationships and trying to very discretely share the Gospel. Imagine if you were bribed to reveal what your team members were doing. What would that do to their work? It would blow their cover and ruin their ministry. Even you my friends will be tempted to betray a fellow disciple. Unless we are fully aware of this fact we cannot protect against it. Never betray a fellow disciple.

For that matter, never betray your witness. Never betray your values. Be faithful to our Lord and He will carry you through.

Let us pray.