

## Second Passion Sermon

### The Seizure Of Christ In The Garden

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**Matt. 26, 47-50.**

And while He yet spake, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people. Now he that betrayed Him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is He; hold Him fast. And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, Master; and kissed Him. And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come? Then came they, and laid hands on Jesus, and took Him.

This is the second part of the history of the events which took place in the garden. Here we are told, in the first place, how Judas, one of the twelve, after he had conferred with the Jews on the subject, and sold the Lord Jesus for thirty pieces of silver, (each of which, according to our coin, is worth about half of a florin), finally also betrayed Him in the garden.

This was a very wicked and scandalous deed, and it is, even at this day, so offensive to many wise and sensible people that, on account of it, they speak evil of the Gospel, and consider its doctrine injurious. For, since Satan keeps no holiday, but chiefly sows his tares among the wheat where he sees the good seed coming forth hopefully, it is no wonder that among those who possess God's pure Word there are found so many disciples of Judas, that is, knaves and infidels.

When the world sees such deeds it quickly passes judgment upon them. Thus we are often compelled to hear how our adversaries of the present day lay all the blame for such offences upon the doctrine, and say: If the doctrine were correct it would also produce good fruit, but since there are so many more offences in the world now than there were formerly, it must follow that the doctrine is false.

True, the Insurrection of the Peasants, in the year 1525, occurred after the Gospel had been brought to light. Then followed the Sacramentarians, Anabaptists, and other sects, the like of which no one heard nor saw before the Gospel came to us. But does it, therefore, follow that the doctrine is bad, and that such offences were produced by the doctrine? We shall find the answer to this if we examine that villain, Judas, who was neither Gentile nor Turk; neither was he a Jew of that kind which uttered resistance to Christ and paid no attention to the Word of God. Matthew says that he was "one of the twelve," whom Christ had called to preach, to baptize in His name, to cast out devils, and to perform all manner of glorious miracles. And since the Lord knew his knavery from the beginning, there is no doubt that He instructed Judas more than the rest, always admonishing him not to give place to sin and temptation. In connection with the Holy Supper the Evangelists specially mention that the Lord would every now and then let fly a word or two at him, if, peradventure, he might be turned from his sin. And, finally, He gave him a sop, no doubt casting upon him a longing look, as though He would say: O, thou poor fellow, how canst thou be my enemy? What cause do I give thee for intending such things against me?

But since nothing could prevail with him, and since he gave place to temptation and even yielded to it, the Lord said unto him: "That thou doest, do quickly;" as if He wanted to say: I see well enough that all warnings and admonitions are in vain; go, then; there is no help for thee.

Now what shall we say to this, that the desperate villain commits such a hideous sin, and harbors such malice and bitterness against his Lord and Master, in whose name he also had performed miracles, that, for the sake of a trifling sum of money, he betrays and sells the innocent, pious, gracious and gentle Lord and Saviour, well knowing that it would cost His life? Whom shall we blame for this? Here we read that he was one of the twelve. Shall we, therefore, say that the Lord Jesus and the doctrine which Judas heard of Christ are to blame? If Christ had taught him better things, would he have done them? But supposing that this thought did occur to you, would you not shudder at it, and fear so to accuse the Lord Jesus? For you know that He is holy and righteous, and the enemy of every vice; yea, that the object of all His teaching and preaching was to check and ward off sin and save from death. Why, then, would you impute such crime to our dear Lord? You should rather say: If Judas had not been such a scandalous, wicked villain that every friendly warning was thrown away upon him, and could not free him from his malice, he would have behaved himself differently; for, although the other Apostles were so very weak that they were offended because of the Lord Jesus, they still do not fall into sin so monstrous as that of Judas, who must, therefore, have been such an ar-rant knave that nothing could save him.

Why then do you not pass the same judgment upon similar cases which occur at present? Why do you blame and blaspheme the Holy Gospel for that which wicked men and Satan have committed? For if Christ Himself cannot preach with such earnestness and power that Judas ceases to be a scoundrel, as he was from the beginning, it is no wonder that the like is seen among us also, and that not all obey the Word.

The Peasants' War, as stated before, followed after God had restored the Gospel to us; we have no desire to deny this. But must the Gospel, therefore, be reproached for this offence and mischief? Were there not insurrections and offences in the world before the Gospel was preached? We should rather argue as follows: Satan hates the Gospel; men are by nature corrupt and inclined to evil; therefore, Satan and the evil world have caused these offences, so that the good seed, which is the pure, wholesome doctrine, might be despised by men.

Thus originated the Sacramentarians and Anabaptists also, of whom no one heard before the coming of the Gospel. But the Gospel is not to blame. The devil, and then the temerity of idle and frivolous hearts which do not hold fast the Word, but follow their own wisdom, whistled for this jig, and prepared this terrible evil and such pernicious scandal.

Even at this day, as we see, this scandal prevails, that avarice and usury, lasciviousness and gluttony, and other vices are more common among those who boast of the Gospel than they were formerly under the papacy. Whence comes this filth? Is it learned from the Gospel? Are the preachers to blame? No, such thoughts be far from us! That would be abusing and calumniating God and His dear Word, and the Gospel ministry which is God's most precious gift. But we must blame the very devil, who is chagrined when he sees the field well prepared and sowed with good seed; for this admirably impairs his kingdom. Therefore, while the house-holder sleeps, he comes with his seed of wickedness, and scatters tares over the whole field.

But thus he does not bring it about that the tares alone grow. For even as Judas, one of the twelve, was a rascal, while the other disciples, notwithstanding their frailty, did not fall into such shocking sin; so, while many and very common offences exist, we also find many noble, pious Christians, who abide in the Word in all sincerity, live in the fear of God and guard against offences. We should be satisfied with this and thank God

for it. And since we cannot get rid of this Judas, we shall have to tolerate him, still remembering that not all are like him, but that some of the disciples turned out better.

The instance of the spoiled child, Judas, teaches us, first, that we must not revile the Gospel like [some Christians], but recognize the true cause of offences in the devil and in those disobedient hearts which believe not the Word and will not be bettered by the Word.

Secondly, it teaches us, by that dreadful fall, to fear God. For, as was said above, Judas was no common person, but an Apostle, and, doubtless, possessed many noble, excellent gifts; this is indicated by his having a special office among the disciples, the Lord having appointed him householder, or steward.

Now this Judas, who was an Apostle, who in Jesus' name preached repentance and remission of sins, who baptized, cast out devils, and did other miracles, apostatized most shamefully from God and became the enemy of Christ, whom, for a little silver, he sold, betrayed and delivered over to be slaughtered. And since such a terrible misfortune befell so great a man as Judas, we surely have reason never to feel secure, but to fear God, to beware of sin, and, without ceasing, to pray that God would not lead us into temptation, but that when temptation comes upon us He would mercifully sustain us, deliver us from it, and not suffer us to stick fast in it. For unless the greatest caution is exercised and the weapon of prayer is diligently used, it is a very easy matter to fall and commit sin.

The case of Judas stands thus. He was an avaricious fellow; the Evangelists mention several times that he was in the habit of stealing from the treasury, which, according to the Lord's appointment, was in his care. He gave the reins to this sin and became addicted to it. He permitted men to talk and to preach to him, as, alas! some of the miserable, provoking Christians of our day let themselves be talked and preached to; but went nevertheless and stole wherever he could, and

thought himself in no danger because he was an Apostle as well as the rest.

Because he thus gave place to sin, his carnal security finally brought him so far that the devil entered into him quite, and urged him on to the attainment of his outrageous purpose of betraying his dear Lord and Master for fifteen florins. Since the devil was thus successful in leading Judas to this act of treachery, the greater wretchedness followed that Judas fell into despair and hanged himself on account of such sin. This is the end the devil had in view.

Now we should diligently observe this case of Judas and, as already stated, be admonished by it to keep a clear conscience; to live in the true fear of God; and not to cease praying that God would uphold us by His Word, rule us by His Holy Spirit, and keep us from sin. For if we make a mistake in an apparently trifling matter even, unspeakably great misery may ensue. Our dear Lord Jesus, in the 11. chapter of Luke, warns us against this, saying: "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out. And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first." We have instances of this before us. Before the blessed Gospel came to light again, the devil enjoyed perfect tranquility; he had ensnared nearly every heart by a spurious worship and by reliance on good works. But God has now banished him by the Gospel, that we might know that God is not served and that we are not benefited by the celebration of masses, by vigils, pilgrimages and monkery. God's Word has taught us a different form of worship, which the 2. Ps. calls "kissing the Son;" and God from heaven declared it "hearing and believing in His Son." This we know.

Let us see what takes place now. The devil would gladly come back to his old home; but he can not, for he finds the entrance blocked up and

himself exposed by the light of God's Word. "Then goeth he and taketh to him seven," that is, innumerable, "other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in and dwell there." We see that most men are under the impression that they can lead a lewd life, practice covetousness and usury, lie and deceive, and still be in no danger, and be good Christians all the while. Wherever there is a hole left open for the devil, even if we would think it too small for him to peep through, it is large enough for him to stick his head in and drag his whole body after. In this way he entered into Judas too. We might think his stealing ten or twenty dollars a very little matter; but because he continually hankered after the pleasures of this sin, and did not suffer God's Word to restrain him, the devil finally prevails on him, for the sake of money, to lead his blessed Lord and Master like an ox to the slaughter.

Hence the warning: Fear God and shun sin. But if you will continue in sin, you may look out for the danger, to which you thus expose yourself; for the devil does not go to work with the intention of conferring favors on you. He prompted Judas to avarice until he led him through despair to the gallows. Let this be your warning, and desist in time! Earnestly beseech God that He would, for Christ's sake, not impute to you your iniquity, and then reform! This is the will of God. He permitted this dreadful example of Judas to be given that we might study it and recoil from it. For who would have thought that such a terrible sin could have such an insignificant beginning! O, do not make light of this; do not think in your heart: I can do so and so, and still be a Christian, — I will make amends some day, &c. The devil is too cunning for you; when he has once spun his web about you, it will not be easy for you to tear yourself away.

So much for the example of Judas. From another point of view our text furnishes us comfort and admonition. It is always the case, that, as our Lord Jesus fared on earth, so must His Church and precious Gospel fare to the end of the world. Judas, one of His disciples, betrays Christ. Thus, they who hold churchly offices and bear ecclesi-

astical titles and names, wish to be regarded as the heads and rulers of the Church; it is not thirty pieces of silver, as in the case of Judas, but many thousand dollars that make them traitors and archenemies of the Church. [We see such examples in today's church, and have throughout history, from the very beginning of Christ's dealings by Caiphas.] And finally Pilate, the civil government, also joins them, and attempts to exterminate the Gospel with the sword.

... And even to-day the ranks of Judas' army are being swelled by those who use the Gospel for coining gold, with which they then feed their avarice, ambition, pride and lust. These should, indeed, consider Judas' end. ... Sooner or later remorse shall come; and, should no amendment follow, these Gospel-venders, together with Judas their master, shall receive eternal death and damnation as their recompense, in the depths of hell. Let no one doubt this! But, my friends, let us not envy these [fallen brothers] because God permits them for a little while to wallow in the filth of their obscene lusts; the thirty pieces of silver, for which they sell their Lord every day, will lie heavily enough upon their souls when Christ shall say to them: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." Besides, their heart and conscience cannot be long satisfied

For, although they may for a time live in thoughtlessness, security and riot, when eventually that little black dog, Remorse by name, begins to bark, it will go badly enough with them; then, with eternal ruin yawning before them, they shall see and feel what Isaiah meant in his 48. chapter, when he said: "There is no peace unto the wicked." We have instances before us at the present time of the terrible end which came upon several of the most prominent adversaries of the Gospel.

This we say with reference to Judas, of whom the Evangelists tell us how he sold Christ, led the Jews into the garden and betrayed the Lord Jesus with a kiss, which, according to Matthew, was the sign he should give the Jews. This

is also applicable to those false prophets who, because they have the authority of office, mislead poor consciences with false and impure doctrine.

The Evangelist John mentions two remarkable miracles performed in the garden by our Lord Jesus. One of them is the following. When the Jews had come into the garden to the Lord Jesus, He asked them, "Whom seek ye?" And when they had answered Him, "Jesus of Nazareth," His reply, "I am He," so frightened them that they all went backward and fell to the ground as if they had been struck by lightning. This was done by a special and divine power, which the Lord showed forth at that time, not alone to terrify the Jews, but also to strengthen His disciples. These, instead of venturing, as they did, to rescue Jesus by force, might have concluded from this display of power that if the Lord did not choose to give Himself up unto death, He was able to defend Himself and resist His enemies without calling upon others for assistance or protection. The Lord wanted no violence done, and severely remonstrates with Peter on this subject, as we shall see. This miracle, therefore, serves as a protection against that gulf of offences, in which both the Jews and afterwards even the disciples came near drowning. Since the Lord suffered Himself to be seized, allowed the Jews to play on Him their wanton pranks, and finally permitted Himself to be so shamefully executed upon the cross, even the disciples were so offended that they forgot all those miracles which they had seen Him do and all those powerful sermons they had heard of Him, and thought that everything was over with Him now,—that their hopes had been all in vain. And, on the other hand, the unbelieving and malicious Jews felt certain that their object would be well accomplished as soon as they should have Him nailed to the cross.

How glorious, therefore, this miracle! The great multitude of Jews, armed with swords and staves, provided with authority from the rulers, and eager and desperate to do its work, is driven back and so frightened that they all fall to the ground as if some enemy had violently thrust them down; and all this by the single word, "I am

He," spoken by a man who stood alone and weaponless, and who did nothing more than speak most friendly words. The disciples see this great miracle; the Jews also feel its force; still it is soon forgotten. Yea, because Christ so patiently submitted to His sufferings and used no other power against His enemies, they took Him to be a mere man.

But they should in all reason have argued as follows: If this Man is able, with a single word, which is neither invective nor curse, but only a gentle reply, as with a thunderbolt, to strike down such great, strong, bold and armed men, then must there surely be a deep meaning in His voluntary resignation. He is able to defend and protect Himself, but instead of doing so He submits. He therefore does not desire the aid of men. And, although He now hides His power and permits the Jews to do with Him what they will, this shall, by no means, be the end of it. Dismay must seize His enemies, but He must conquer. For that divine power which He showed forth so frequently, and which He manifests here in the garden especially by the single word, "I am He," cannot remain withheld and repressed for a great length of time, &c.

The disciples in particular should have regarded the miracle in this light. There can be no doubt that it was to this end that the Lord here revealed His divine might. But alas! the effects of this were too quickly lost upon both parties. The Jews, intent on their mischief, feared no further. The disciples, running hither and thither, now sad, now terrified, had no hope of ever again seeing their Lord and Master, to say nothing of their despairing of ever being further benefited by Him. This was the "hour of darkness," as Christ calls it in the Gospel according to St. John, in which offences prevailed and the devil exercised His power. It was for this reason that the Lord so earnestly admonished the disciples, "Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation."

The other miracle is similar to this. It is performed by Christ's second answer: "I have told you that I am He; if therefore ye seek me, let

these go their way." Our dear Lord is alone, and has neither sword nor spear; whereas Judas, the traitor, comes upon Him with a great multitude. We would think that our dear Lord had reason to entreat and beg, seeing that He stands against such numbers. But He advances and commands the Jews that they should let His disciples alone, and not lay hands on one of them. This is a stern command: *Sinite hos abire*, "Let these go;" and we see that it was not given in vain. For they, no doubt, set out with the thought that they would capture the whole company, Master and disciples. But this command compels them to desist from their intention of taking the disciples, although Peter did not deserve this, because he lay about him with his sword.

But why does the Lord give such a command? It is not incorrect to say, that He wishes to show by this that He esteems His own life more lightly than the lives of His disciples; for He rescues them while He lets Himself be taken and bound. For the same reason He calls Himself a "Good Shepherd" who "giveth His life for the sheep;" and shows us His love as a special example, saying: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." We clearly see that He is silent about His own person; the Jews do with Him what they please and He does not hinder them. But He wants them to let His disciples alone and to do no violence to them. This shows that He cares more for them than for Himself.

This was not done without a purpose. Our dear Lord Jesus wanted no partners in the sufferings before Him. For, as the 53. chapter of Isaiah tells us, "The Lord hath laid on Him," on Him alone, "the iniquity of us all," and this He had to bear alone and for this offer Himself as a sacrifice. True, the disciples also were afterwards compelled to suffer for the sake of Christ and His Word, as Christ had told James and John: "Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of."

But the suffering of the Lord Jesus was a suffering for my sins, for thy sins, and for the sins

of all the world; so that now, for Christ's sake, God will not only forgive and pass by these sins, but also bestow righteousness and eternal life upon me, upon thee, and upon all believers. For this reason Christ desired to be alone, and permitted no one to be seized nor to suffer with Him.

This should be preached in all churches throughout Christendom, and with all diligence should the people be continually taught to hope for the forgiveness of every sin, alone through the sufferings and death of Christ, &c. But this is not done by [some]. Their tongues, indeed, confess that Jesus is the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world; but their actions give their words the lie. This they prove by their so woe-fully deceiving the poor people with their falsehoods; telling them to invoke deceased saints, of these saints to seek pardon for their sins, and with the merits of these saints to console themselves, and in virtue of their doing this they receive indulgences. This is as much as saying that Christ desired associates in His sufferings, and accomplished nothing by Himself.

That the Lord was afterwards crucified between "two thieves" has its peculiar signification, viz., to show for whom Christ's sufferings avail, and upon whom they are lost; of which, however, we have no time to speak at present. But here in the garden the word is: *Sinite has abire*, "Let these go;" I alone am fit for this work; to suffer and to die for the sins of the world is an office which belongs to me alone. Neither John, Peter or James can do anything in this; let all these go their way! I, "I am He;" me you must lay hold on, me capture, me bind, me crucify, unto me it is given to take away the sin of the world; and all who believe in me, that is, comfort themselves with my suffering and death, shall find a gracious God and eternal life.

This, then, is the second part of the history of those things concerning Christ which occurred in the garden. It teaches us: first, to bear in mind this terrible fall of the Apostle Judas, to abide in the fear of God, to avoid sin, and to be diligent in prayer that God may in mercy prevent us from

fulling as Judas fell; secondly, that we also, as true Christians, shall be sorely molested by the avarice of some Judas or other, that we must patiently endure this and cling to the consolation that Christ, though He may be weak in us now,

will show His power at the proper time, and graciously protect and preserve us. The Ever-living Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ grant us this by His Holy Spirit. Amen.