

LORD, IS IT I? (Mt. 26:14-25)

INTRODUCTION: Within each one of us are tremendous and extreme possibilities. Under certain conditions, some of us could possibly betray Jesus Christ as Judas did, and others could deny Jesus as Peter did. Under other conditions, we have the possibility to rise to great spiritual heights. Last Sunday, and on other occasions I have spoken of the possibilities for great spiritual achievements in any Christian life. Now tonight I want to speak of the dark side of this tremendous possibility. We face this haunting question every time we sincerely ask, "Lord, is it I?"

I. The Possibility for Betrayal of the Lord is real, very real.

A. Do you know which one of the apostles it was who asked the Lord, "Is it I?" Who was it? What was his name?

In fact, the scripture tells us that "Every one of them" asked the Lord this question.

John, who was always so close to him, the "beloved disciple" John asked this question.

Peter, who later denied him, asked this question, apparently no more sure in his heart than was John.

B. Every one of us might well ask the same question.

1. All should search their heart about the possibility of betrayal.

2. Ways of betraying the Lord —

delivering him over to his enemies.

a. Betraying the gospel by misrepresentation, oversimplification, making it say what we want it to say or think it should say.

b. By delivering our conscience, our supreme allegiance, over to the enemies of Christ.

c. This is worse than for a citizen to betray his or her country to its enemies.

II. The Identification of the traitor.

A. The one who dipped his hand with Jesus in the dish.

Usually there is some overt act of sinful disobedience which shows spiritual betrayal.

B. The answer of Jesus, "Thou hast said," after Judas asked, "Master, is it I?"

Usually there is some direct word from the mouth of the traitor, when properly understood, condemns him: "Thou hast said."

Then this personal word is followed by some direct word from the Lord which confirms the identification and shows obviously whose side the traitor is on.

III. The Tragic Judgment of the Traitor

A. "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" (Mt. 26:24).

What a solemn woe it is which the Lord pronounces on anyone who betrays him!

B. "Woe" is one of the shortest but most ominous words of our language, used to express enormous grief, regret, or suffering. It reveals a condition of deep affliction, ruinous trouble, and inexpressible calamity.

C. The Bible uses this word concerning the wicked who reward evil, or one who strives with his maker, one who builds by unrighteousness, or of the bloody city.

"Woe" describes the judgment of one who increases that which is not his, or of one who gives his neighbor strong drink, of hypocritical scribes and pharisees.

The Bible says "woe" to all who call evil good and good evil, to them who are wise in their own eyes, and to them who proclaim unrighteous decrees. "Woe" to complacent believers who are at ease in Zion, to all that devise iniquity and rise up early to practice evil.

These are just a few "woes" that are given in the Bible. If we listen carefully today, I suggest that in our imagination we, like John, can hear an Angel of Judgment flying over this land saying, "Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth."

D. But Jesus pronounced a SPECIAL woe on anyone who betrays Him.

Such betrayal is not a spontaneous lapse of faith; it is a premeditated plan which deliberately seeks for opportunities to betray Jesus and deliver him into the hands of his enemies.

See Mt. 26:16; Judas took the initiative and went to the chief priests and said, "What will you give me if I deliver him to you?"

They did not seek Judas out and tempt him.

Judas sought them out and tried to make a deal. Matthew tells us, "And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him."

E. This is the type of betrayal I am talking about tonight. In our terminology, we would say that people like Judas were never saved in the first place.

We are not talking about the momentary stumbling of a weak Christian, but about those who act like Christians, pretend to be Christians, associate with Christians in the church, talk like Christians because they know the lingo and right words and expressions, but in their hearts they never have been saved.

When the right time comes in their own minds, they will seek out an opportunity to apostasize from the faith which they never embraced in their hearts; they will try to make a deal with evil; they will show their true colors, and they will take the initiative in seeking out opportunities to damage the cause of Christ, to crucify the Son of God afresh, and tread underfoot his precious blood, and help Satan in his evil work in this godless world.

F. It happens all the time.

Judas was not the only one or the last one to betray Jesus Christ.

It could conceivably be someone around this Lord's Table here in this church tonight.

We are not here to pass judgment or to look suspiciously around at one another, for we are not responsible for one another's soul in this way. We should, rather, humbly say, "Lord, is it I?" and scrutinize our own soul.

G. There is hope for any Christian who denies the Lord in a moment of spiritual weakness.

Peter was forgiven, restored, and greatly used of God.

But there was no forgiveness or salvation for Judas, primarily because he didn't want it bad enough to repent of his sinful life and be saved and have his life turned around by Jesus Christ.

If God could take the impetuous, blundering, fisherman apostle who denied his Lord three times, and make him a Rock of Testimony;

If God could take a backsliding King who had committed murder and adultery, and forgive him, and make him the "sweet singer of Israel";

If God could take a sinful Boston shoe salesman and make him into the D.L. Moody who shook two continents for God;

Then God can take the weakest, humblest person in this audience, if you will let him, and grant you the privilege of the highest spiritual achievement of our generation.

CONCLUSION:

Right now he might be calling someone here from denial and failure to victorious Christian living and some special Christian vocation or service.

I dare you to say sincerely, "Lord, is it I?"

Then say, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." Robert Browning, in one of his beautiful and profound poems, has Count Guido appealing at first to his nobility, his ancestry, his influence, his friends, and his good works. But at last he cries to his judges, "Sirs, my first true word and no lie is—save me notwithstanding. So does God hear our penitent prayer when we plead not our own merits, but when we pray: Save me notwithstanding.

Max. Hts. B.C. St. Pete. Mar. 30, 1988