

THE SUFFERING SAVIOUR

Meditations on the Last Days of Christ

By

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CHAPTER EIGHT

JUDAS ISCARIOT

ABOUT the same time that the Word became flesh in Bethlehem, and the angels of God sang their seraphic anthem at His appearance, there was joy also in the cottage of Simon of Carioth, in the tribe of Judah, for there likewise had a son, though only a mortal, seen the light of this world. His parents, thankful and hopeful, called the boy "Judas," that is, the praise of God, or the confessor; and thus recognized the Almighty who had graciously given him to them.

The little boy was well-formed, and of pleasing appearance; for it was not yet written on his forehead what he should eventually become, and what should befall him in the course of his earthly pilgrimage. Ah! we now regard that domestic event with other eyes, and look upon the unhappy parents with poignant grief, for we know that prophetic passages had reference to him:

- **"Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me"** (Psalm 41:9).
- **"As he loved cursing, so let it come unto him; as he delighted not in blessing, so let it be far from him"** (Psalm 109:17).
- **"Let his days be few, and let another take his office"** (Psalm 109:8).

We are without any tradition respecting Judas' earlier life; but we certainly do not mistake if we take it for granted that his gradual development was such as to justify uncommon hopes.

He soon showed himself possessed of superior abilities, acute understanding, and energetic will, and therefore seemed, as he was probably soon conscious himself, to be capable of deeds of a superior kind than the limited current of quiet, civil life affords opportunity for performing. It was to be foreseen that he would eventually render himself conspicuous on the stage of public life in some way or other. Accordingly, as with the abundance of his talents, he fell under heavenly or adverse influence, he would necessarily develop himself, either as a chosen instrument of God or as an apostle and standardbearer of Satan.

Alas! he took the left-hand road, and we exclaim respecting him, with deeper and more well-founded grief than Isaiah concerning the king of Babylon, **"How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, Son of the morning!"**

The heathen world has no Judas, and could not produce such a character. Such a monster matures only in the radiant sphere of Christianity. He entered into too close contact with the Saviour not to become either entirely His or wholly Satan's. There was a time when, with reference to Judas, "the candle of God shone upon his head, and when the secret of God was upon his tabernacle."

Once he was not wanting in susceptibility for impressions of the most devotional kind, and his soul was capable of every noble elevation of feeling. The appearing of the fairest of the children of men in the glory of His marvelous deeds, attracted him, in His character of Saviour and the Friend of sinners. He swore fealty to the banner of Jesus with youthful enthusiasm, though with an unbroken will; and the Searcher of Hearts, perceiving the promising talents of the young man - who was really zealous for the cause of God in a certain degree - confidently admitted him into the circle of His nearest and most intimate disciples.

This favor would never have been granted to Judas if he had attached himself to the Saviour simply from interested motives. At the moment when he offered his services, he was no hypocrite, at least not consciously so. And when he afterward prayed, studied the Word of God, and even preached it with the other disciples, it was doubtless done for a time with a degree of inward truthfulness: it was only in the sequel that he resorted to intentional deception and dissimulation.

The Lord appointed him to the office of receiver and almoner in His little circle; and assuredly did so for no other reason than that He perceived he was the fittest for that vocation. Many have profanely supposed that the Lord committed the purse to him in order to tempt him; but such a thought is wholly to be rejected. On the contrary, that circumstance affords us an additional confirmation of the fact that Judas, at the commencement of his discipleship, possessed the full confidence of his Master, although it could not have been hidden from the latter that the disciple was still deficient in a thorough knowledge of Himself, and especially in contrition of heart, to which a participation in the salvation of God is inseparably attached.

Amid pious sentiment, an evil root remained within, which was the love of the world, and especially of its gold and empty honor. And, in fact, Judas deceived himself when on attaching himself to the cause of the great Nazarene, he supposed he was following the attraction of a high and noble purpose; his fellow-disciples believed it no less of him. The latent wound did not escape the Saviour's eyes, but the mischief was not incurable, and Christ had appeared in order that, as the divine Physician, He might heal the sick, and bind up the wounded.

The compassionate love of Jesus left no means untried to accomplish the cure; but alas! the result did not correspond with His tender and unwearied solicitude. It only too soon appeared that the pleasing enthusiasm which had borne Judas on its wings so near the Prince of Peace, was, in its inmost center, anything but pure fire from heaven.

For the more his delusive ideas concerning the real nature of Christ's kingdom were dispelled by the Lord's manner of life, as well as by His expressions and discourses, the fainter burned the torch of his specious zeal, and what remained of it in his heart was the impure fire of a selfish, earthly expectation and desire.

O do not let us deceive ourselves! even the most magnanimous characters, as long as they are not sanctified by Christ, are capable, according to circumstances, of acting not only meanly, but even basely and vulgarly. The natural man, in his most intellectual form, does not lose his centaur-like nature; the consequence of which is, that after having been engaged in possibly the most elevated pursuits, he is found the next moment creeping, like the serpent in Eden, upon his belly, and eating of the dust of the earth.

The period arrived in which Judas actually laid his thievish hand, for the first time, upon the charitable fund entrusted to him; and after he had once broken through the barriers of his moral consciousness, the next and every subsequent embezzlement became easier and less objectionable. But the condemning voice of conscience was now awakened by the sight of his sacred Master. The Light of the world was to him a burning fire; the Saviour of sinners, even by His mute appearance, an inquisitor before whom he must either expose himself as a guilty criminal, or envelop himself in the veil of hypocritical deceit; and he chose the latter.

For a considerable time he thought himself safe in the disguise of his conscious hypocrisy, until the scene occurred in the house of Simon the Leper at Bethany.

Mary's devotedness to the Saviour induced her to pour the costly ointment upon Him. Judas, destitute of feeling for the tenderness and deep significancy of the act, endeavored to depreciate it by the sanctimonious, and yet rude remark, that the ointment had better have been sold, and the product given to the poor. But the Lord, immediately interfering for the aggrieved woman, praised her work as "**good,**" and as an act which should never be forgotten; at the same time reproving the ill-timed censure of the heartless hypocrite with the serious words, which must have penetrated into His inmost soul, "**The poor ye have always with you, but me ye have not always.**"

From those words, and still more from the painfully compassionate look which accompanied them, the hypocritical disciple became fully aware that the Lord saw through him, and knew of his crime.

This was a decisive moment for Judas - a moment in which blessing and cursing were once more offered to his choice, and one which must necessarily exercise a definite influence for good or evil on the further development of his inward life. The erring disciple must now either cast himself down at Jesus' feet, with streams of penitential tears, and seek, by a frank confession of his lost condition, deliverance and mercy at the throne of grace; or his mortified pride must gain the victory, and by urging him to the opposite course of a willful hardening, afford Satan the opportunity of imparting the infernal spark of secret bitterness against Him.

You know which of these two courses Judas took.

Immediately after his Master uttered these words, which were only a mild reproof, and intended to heal, Judas hastened away from the company at Bethany. He now felt himself more at home, and more in his element among the adversaries of Jesus than in the sphere of his previous confederates. The bargain of the thirty pieces of silver was concluded - more from a secret thirst of revenge, than from avarice and the love of money.

Judas met the remonstrance of his conscience with the excuse that it would be an easy thing for the wonder-working Rabbi if He chose, to save Himself from the hands of His enemies.

However, he knew only half of what he was doing. He had plunged himself into a vortex against which he was unable to struggle. He no longer guided himself; another dragged him away behind him. He had reached the horrible state of those whose **“feet stumble upon the dark mountains.”**

It might have been supposed that Judas would have been no longer able to bear the company of Jesus. We nevertheless soon see him again in his old place among the twelve. I know not whether that which drew him thither was the tormenting uneasiness he felt, and the inward curse, or whether it was the apprehension of drawing down suspicion upon him if he were absent; or perhaps he even calculated on the possibility of the Saviour’s establishing a kingdom, according to his views of it, and was desirous of reserving the part he had to play in such a case.

Probably all these motives co-operated to induce him to present himself among them. Suffice it to say that we meet the son of perdition in the last social evening circle at Jerusalem; and we see the Lord again trying everything to save the soul thus sick unto death. From a delicate wish to spare his feelings, He does not require him to give up the custody of the money, but leaves him still in the office assigned him.

It was necessary, however, that the Lord should give him to understand the danger in which He knew the poor man’s soul to be placed; and hence, while sitting at table, the Saviour begins, with deep emotion and affectionate grief, to say to His disciples, **“Verily, verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me!”**

The eleven are struck with inexpressible amazement. They look at each other with alarm and grief, and break out in turn into the anxious inquiry, **“Lord, is it I?”** The son of perdition does not discover himself. Ah, only a few minutes now remain of his day of grace! A voice from within, as though it were his good angel, says to him, “Reveal thyself, Judas; throw down the mask, and escape from eternal perdition, before the door of mercy is closed.” But Judas resists, and envelopes himself still more deeply in his disguise; for another voice still more powerfully pervades his soul, and drowns every better feeling within him.

The Lord then defines His meaning more particularly, and says, **“He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me,”** and then solemnly pronounces the woe upon the man who should commit this heinous crime, and reveals to him his fate.

The hearts of the eleven tremble. Simon Peter beckons to the disciple who leaned on Jesus’ bosom to inquire who it is of whom their Master is speaking. John then ventures, though timidly, to ask, **“Lord, who is it?”** The latter now tears away the last shred of the mask from the traitor’s face, and says, **“He it is to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it. And when he had dipped the sop, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon.”**

The disciples shudder, and Judas stands, pale as a corpse, trembling, his eyes wandering, and completely unmanned. "O Judas, there is still time! The sounds that have hitherto smote thy ear were all intended to call thee to repentance. Bethink thee; cast away thy disguise; confess, and cry for mercy!" "But shall I confess?" - thinks Judas to himself. "Shall I give honor to Him who has so mercilessly exposed me? - condemn myself, in the presence of my comrades, to eternal disgrace, and show myself before all the world as a miserable coward? No, I'll be a man and act accordingly."

Such was probably the language of his soul, and with a mixture of boldness and profound perturbation, while swallowing the sop, in hypocritical indifference, notwithstanding the unmistakable words of the Master, he still ventures to stammer out the question, "**Master, is it I?**"

The Lord now giving up the son of perdition, with infinite grief of heart replies, "**Thou sayest it.**" That moment, the evil will of Judas overcame the last and most powerful attraction of mercy, and the sin against the Holy Ghost was perpetrated. The day of salvation closed; the hour of the visitation of divine mercy expired; the angels of peace sorrowfully removed from his side, and Satan triumphantly entered into him. The saying of the Saviour, "**One of you is a devil,**" was now verified. The most terrible specimen of humanity which had hitherto trod the earth, now appeared upon the stage.

Then said Jesus unto him in conclusion, "**That thou doest, do quickly!**" thereby giving him to understand that He was fully aware of his intention. He intimated to him at the same time that He henceforth regarded him as the instrument by which His heavenly Father would deliver Him up to the sufferings to which He was on the point of submitting from voluntary love to sinners.

The eleven knew not how to explain the words, "**That thou doest, do quickly.**" Some of them thought, in their simplicity, that because Judas carried the bag, the Lord had said to him, "**Buy those things we have need of against the feast,**" while others imagined their Master had given Judas a hint to distribute something to the poor - so far were they from having any idea of the crime which one of their number was about to commit. The latter, however, understood the Lord Jesus better. But let us not overlook the circumstance, that Jesus while saying, "**That thou doest, do quickly!**" dismissed the traitor from the circle of His confidential followers, and from the chamber in which they were assembled. And probably those expositors are right who, on the testimony of the beloved disciple, consider that Judas was no longer present when the sacrament was instituted.

Scarcely had the son of perdition left the room and the Lord Jesus saw Himself alone with His eleven faithful disciples, when the burden was removed from His heart.

The Saviour breathes more freely, and then begins with sublime elevation of soul to say, "**Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God be glorified in him, God shall also glorify him in himself, and shall straightway glorify him.**"

Judas went out. With awful significance, the narrative adds, "**And it was night.**"

Yes, night externally and internally. We see the deplorable being now entirely sold under the influence of the powers of darkness, and fitted for committing the most horrible crime. Although he is confused and half unconscious of what he is doing, the gloomy power to which he has submitted himself hurries him away in its whirl, and he is no longer able to direct his steps as he pleases.

O Judas, Judas! happy would it have been wert thou the only one of thy kind! But the name of thy brethren, even in the present day, is legion.

From the camp of the world comes the infernal war-cry,

“Away with Jesus and the doctrine of His cross!” Phenomena such as those which meet us in the present day, were never before seen in the world in such anti-Christian atrocity and massiveness. The traitor, Judas, is again visible on the stage, full of deadly hatred to God, in a thousand colossal antitypes: and if there is one doctrine of the Holy Scriptures which finds in the present day its tangible confirmation, it is that of the existence of a Ruler of Darkness, and of a kingdom of infernal powers. The prophetic expression in the Revelation is fulfilled, “**The devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.**” The Pentecost of hell is being accomplished, and it pours out its spirit over mankind like a shower of fire and brimstone, and its shield-bearers and apostles shoot up from the earth, like the fungus, in a night.

Let everyone beware of being baptized with such a baptism!

He that does not decide for the Lord today, may tomorrow be found opposed to Him, and carrying the banner of Satan. Neutrality is a forlorn position. He that enters but half-way into the prevailing tendency of the present day, finishes his course before he is aware that he is in the snare of the devil.

Let us therefore hasten to the Lord Jesus, and devote ourselves, with body and soul, unto Him as an entire offering, which is but our reasonable service. Recourse to His wounds is still open today, but may perhaps not be so tomorrow. Rise up, therefore, and secure your souls; and pray that you may be preserved from the snares of Satan, and from the hour of temptation which shall come upon all the inhabitants of the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.

~ end of chapter 8 ~

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