

Sermon for 19/4/20: "All that glitters, and our just reward!"

Friends, last week we began the text of Acts 1:15-20 and I called the talk "Wolves in sheep's clothing". And we saw how just because somebody had all the outward appearances of being Christian, it did not make them one of God's people. Judas had all the signs, and was involved in all the ministry, the testifying, the feeding of the poor, the miracles and everything else. And yet still he was a child of the devil! I said we must beware and test every teaching that we receive, because only God's Word holds Salvation for us.

We saw also that the Holy Spirit is the author of the Bible. God breathed his breath into men, and they penned his truth!

Well now, we continue by looking at the tragic outcome of that man called Judas. I've called the sermon "All that Glitters, and our just reward". As Peter explains in graphic detail the terrible earthly outcome of this man Judas, who had been so privileged to have even been called by Peter to be "one of our number and shared (sharer) in this ministry." Yes, not only had Judas heard and seen it all, he had also lived with them and done it all! He'd heard Jesus speak; he'd seen him walk on water. He'd seen him still the storm and provide food for thousands. He'd seen the lame walk and the blind see. He'd seen demons cast out of people and even seen Lazarus come back from the dead!

So, if we add this all together, it really puts paid to the notion that seeing is believing. Because obviously seeing does not add up to believing! My father has often said to me "son, if he showed himself to me, I would believe in him". Heather's father also says that he believes in God and he also believes in Jesus. Yet perhaps only about 50%. But if he came back today Ron would believe in him. But as I explain to Ron, his 50% will not get him into heaven! Yes, lots of people say if Jesus would just show himself to me, I would believe in Him. Well no, it's not true. It is all of God's mercy and grace that add up to faith!

In Matth. 26:14-16 we read, "Then one of the 12 called Judas Iscariot went to the chief priests and asked, 'what are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?' So they counted out for him 30 silver coins. From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over." Yes, Judas sought to solicit a price for betraying Jesus, so they gave him 30 pieces of silver. Then in verse 47 of that chapter, as we saw some weeks ago, Judas led the mob to get him and in verse 49, even betraying him with a kiss! From Matth. ch. 27:3-10 we read "When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the 30 silver coins to the chief priests and the elders. 'I have sinned', he said, 'for I have betrayed innocent blood'. 'What is that to us?' They replied. 'That's your responsibility'. So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself. The chief priests picked up the coins and said, 'It is against the law to put this into the Treasury, since it is blood money.' So they decided to use the money to buy The Potters field as a burial place for foreigners. That is why it has been called the field of blood to this day. Then what was spoken by the Prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: "They took 30 silver coins, the price set on him by the people of Israel, and they used them to buy the Potters field, as the Lord commanded me.""

So friends, Judas was filled with remorse, but it was all too late. Some years ago, I made a point in a sermon that there are things throughout our lives which we cannot take back! After drinking too much a person gets into a car driving when they shouldn't be. An accident happens and someone is killed. You cannot take that back. Someone robs a shop with a gun in their hand (never meaning to use it), but something goes wrong and the gun goes off. The shopkeeper is hit in the head, not killed

but brain damaged for life. They cannot take it back. In a moment of rage in an argument someone lashes out. The other person falls and hits their head. They die on the way to hospital. It cannot be taken it back! Then finally, perhaps a marriage is struggling, and during a moment of loneliness, confusion, emptiness, or lust, adultery occurs. You can't take that back! Beloved, these can't take back moments can change our lives. And even our whole eternal destiny!

Judas, during a moment, (or perhaps even three years of moments of madness,) had seen a providence for profit and selfish gain. Or so he thought. But that reward had burned a hole in his black soul! He tried to return his ill-gotten gains but these actions of betrayal, he could not take back. The scripture says he was "filled with remorse": not repentance but remorse. There is an eternal difference. One feels pity for self, the other confesses and seeks forgiveness from God through Jesus!

Well he throws down the coins, and the priests who were happy to see an innocent man put to death, don't want to sully the temple with those coins of blood. So in effect Judas buys the field through them by proxy. And he then goes off and hangs himself. Yet as he does he is thrust into the hands of that one whom he has just betrayed! That too, he could not take back. And here is where Peter, (having stood up to address the brethren,) elaborates upon Judas's end. Acts 1:18 "With the reward he got for his wickedness." Firstly brothers and sisters, the point I want to make, is that at the end of our life, and as Paul explains that "these tents", these bodies in which we live wear out, we will all of us (indeed all of mankind), receive our just reward! That payment from God for the lives which we have lived.

Just as Judas received from the hands of the chief priests the "just reward for his wickedness", we too will receive from the hand of the King of all creation, the reward that is awaiting us! A reward of mercy and heaven, or a reward of judgment and hell. You see, they are both rewards. In effect, payment for services rendered, so to speak. One is all of grace, the other is justified wrath poured out. And at that point before the throne of Jesus, it will be all too late, to take anything back! Matt.25:31-34 "When the son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him and he will separate the peoples one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my father, take your inheritance, the Kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world'." Matt 25:41 "Then he will say to those on his left, depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. Matt 25:46 "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

Again Acts chapter 1 verse 18: "With the reward he got for his wickedness Judas bought a field" (or as I explained it was bought on his behalf by the chief priests) with his blood money! "There he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out." Friends, can you think of a more wretched picture of our just reward for sin, than a man with no one to bear witness to his life? No one to stand around the grave site to celebrate his victories and mourn his passing? No one to lament that his life has ceased to be? No, the image which we are left with is of a rotting decaying corpse left hanging from a tree. So ravaged by the weight and burden of sin, rebellion and death, that it is just left hanging from a tree, until finally, the body being separated from the head falls to the ground. And what used to be a man made in the image of God, is turned inside out! Perhaps indicative of how he lived. Always having the appearance of being for Jesus, but with his true self hidden until the end: "his intestines spilled out."

No friends, all that glitters is not gold. And even if it be gold, do we really want the riches of this world simply to forgo those of Christ's world to come? We must beware of those shining things which can catch our eyes in this life. The lure of a dishonest tax credit. The biggest house the fastest car. The cushy job with the best retirement plan. The lusting after another person's spouse. The winning of Lotto or better still Powerball. Oh Lord we say, I could do so much good for you if I had all of that money! No dear friends whatever those be, they are fleeting things which are here today and gone tomorrow and forgotten forever! But he or she who builds their house upon the truth and life, yes, up on the Rock who Jesus Christ is, will never burn or fade away. And indeed they will live forever with him!

I guess in light of such times as these in which we live, of such tremendous uncertainty, how from one day to the next it seems, that so many of those solid foundations upon which modern society is supposedly built are falling apart one by one. How incredibly important it is brothers and sisters to know where we are going. And what reward it is that awaits us from Jesus the judge of all creation! But friends, if you are anything like me, with so much free time on your hands during these uncertain days, the danger which you face is that the time which you would normally spend focusing upon Jesus and his Kingdom, going to Bible studies and attending prayer meetings, preparing for and attending worship, and the other services which you do in His Name, can all so easily fall into the background amongst a myriad of books, TV shows and lounging around the house!

But Beloved, now more than ever, your daily Bible readings and times of prayer, should be of your greatest of priorities! Make sure the Lord's day does not simply blend into all the rest. As though just because we are not gathering in the flesh, His Day holds no importance for our souls. There are fine sermons on Sunday morning on TV from 6.30-8.30am. Be sure to set aside your tithes and offerings. It is easy to fall into bad habits. Just because we can't meet together in the flesh doesn't mean that our financial gratitude to God, for Jesus saving blood should take a holiday. Dear friends, there are still brethren around the world who are relying upon our financial support. We must be careful that we don't fall into that trap of robbing God as Malachi 3:7-10 warns us.

Beloved, with such uncertainty and fear which so abounds today, the danger is that we focus upon those things, and not upon our Risen Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ who is seated at God's Right Hand! Satan's goal is to drive us away from Him, but we must do all that we can to stay true to him! You see, the fleetingness of this life is an all too true reality. Even if we live to be 100 years old like our dear sister Rene, in the scheme of eternity we are not even a full stop. So we mustn't be lured aside by those temporary things, those shining things which catch our eye. Because all that glitters is not gold. And even if it be gold, would we trade our Salvation, our Saviour, and our eternal life, for 30 pieces of silver? (Or for whatever our 30 pieces of silver might be to us). Beloved, what will your just reward be from the hand of Jesus Christ? The wonders of heaven and an eternity with God, or the realities of hell!

Bless you all, you are in my prayers,

Roy.