

Expository Thoughts On Matthew - Matthew

27:1-10

by J.C. Ryle

Transcript

The opening of this chapter describes the delivery of our Lord Jesus Christ into the hands of the Gentiles. The chief priests and elders of the Jews led him away to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor. We may see in this incident the finger of God: it was ordered by his providence that Gentiles as well as Jews should be concerned in the murder of Christ; it was ordered by his providence that the priests should publicly confess that the scepter had departed from Judah. They were unable to put anyone to death without going to the Romans: the words of Jacob were therefore fulfilled. The Messiah, Shiloh had indeed come (Genesis 49:10). The subject that principally occupies the verses we have read is the melancholy end of the false apostle, Judas Iscariot. It is a subject full of instruction: let us mark well what it contains. We see in the end of Judas a plain proof of our Lord's innocence of every charge laid against him. If there was any living witness who could give evidence against our Lord Jesus Christ, Judas Iscariot was the man. A chosen apostle of Jesus, a constant companion in all his journeyings, a hearer of all his teaching, both in public and private—he must have known well if our Lord had done any wrong, either in word or deed. A deserter from our Lord's company, a betrayer of him into the hands of his enemies, it was his interest for his own character's sake, to prove Jesus guilty. It would extenuate and excuse his own conduct if he could make out that his former Master was an offender and an impostor. Why then did not Judas Iscariot not come forward? Why did he not stand forth before the Jewish council and specify his charges, if he had any to make? Why did he not venture to accompany the chief priests to Pilate, and prove to the Romans that Jesus was a malefactor? There is but one answer to these questions. Judas did not come forward as a witness, because his conscience would not let him. Bad as he was, he knew he could prove nothing against Christ; wicked as he was, he knew well that his Master was holy, harmless, innocent, blameless and true. Let this never be forgotten. The absence of Judas Iscariot at our Lord's trial is one among many proofs that the Lamb of God was without blemish, a sinless man. We see for another thing in the end of Judas that there is such a thing as repentance which is too late. We are told plainly that Judas repented himself. We are even told that he went to the priests and said, I have sinned. Yet it is clear that he did not repent unto salvation. This is a point which deserves special attention. It is a common saying that it is never too late to repent. The saying, no doubt, is true, if repentance be true; but unhappily, late repentance is often not genuine. It is possible for a man to feel his sins, and be sorry for them—to be under strong conviction of guilt, and express deep remorse—to be pricked in conscience, and exhibit much distress of mind—and yet, for all this, not repent with his heart. Present danger, or the fear of death, may account for all his feelings, and the Holy Spirit may have done no work whatever on his soul. Let us beware of trusting to a late

repentance. Now is the accepted time today is the day of salvation. One penitent thief was saved in the hour of death, that no man might despair; but only one, that no man might presume. Let us put off nothing that concerns our souls, and above all not put off repentance, under the vain idea that it is a thing in our own power. The words of Solomon on this subject are very fearful: he speaks of men who shall call upon God but he will not answer; who shall seek him early and not find him. (Proverbs Let us see for another thing in the end of Judas how little comfort ungodliness brings a man at the last. We are told that he cast down the thirty pieces of silver for which he had sold his Master in the temple, and went away in bitterness of soul. That money was dearly earned. It brought him no pleasure, even when he had it: the treasures of wickedness profit nothing. (Proverbs 10:2). Sin is, in truth, the hardest of all masters. In its service there is plenty of fair promises, but an utter dearth of performance. Its pleasures are but for a season: its wages are sorrow, remorse, self-accusation and, too often, death. They that sow to the flesh do indeed reap destruction. Are we tempted to commit sin? Let us remember the words of Scripture, your sin will find you out (Numbers 32:23), and resist the temptation. Let us be sure that sooner or later, in this life or in the life to come, in this world or on the judgment day, sin and the sinner will meet face to face, and have a bitter reckoning. Let us be sure that of all trades sin is the most unprofitable. Judas, Achan, Gehazi, Ananias and Sapphira all found it so to their cost. Well might St. Paul say, What fruit had ye in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? (Romans 6:21). Finally let us see in the case of Judas to what a miserable end a man may come if he has great privileges and does not use them rightly. We are told that this unhappy man departed and went, and hanged himself. What an awful death to die. An apostle of Christ, a former preacher of the Gospel, a companion of Peter and John, commits suicide and rushes into God's presence unprepared and unforgiven. Let us never forget that no sinners are so sinful as sinners against light and knowledge. None are so provoking to God: none, if we look at Scripture, have been so often removed from this world by sudden and fearful visitations. Let us remember Lot's wife, Pharaoh, Korah, Dathan, Abiram and Saul, King of Israel: they are all cases in point. It is a solemn saying of Bunyan that none fall so deep into the pit, as those who fall backward. It is written in Proverbs, He that being often reprovèd hardeneth his neck shall suddenly be destroyed and that without remedy. (Proverbs 29:1). May we all strive to live up to our light. There is such a thing as sin against the Holy Ghost: clear knowledge of truth in the head, combined with deliberate love of sin in the heart, go a long way towards it. And now what is the state of our hearts? Are we ever tempted to rest on our knowledge and profession of religion? Let us remember Judas, and beware. Are we disposed to cling to the world, and to give money a prominent place in our minds? Again, let us remember Judas, and beware. Are we trifling with any one sin and flattering ourselves we may repent by and by? Once more, let us remember Judas, and beware. He is set up before us as a beacon: let us look well at him, and not make shipwrecked.

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