

Betrayed by a Kiss

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[0 : 00] This is the AM service on the 22nd of March 1998. The preacher is Stephen Carnaby.

His sermon is entitled, Retrayed by a Kiss, and is from Matthew chapter 26, verses 47 to 56. While the children are going out to Sunday school, I'd like each one of you to picture in your mind what was the last movie that you saw. It might have been at the cinema, it might have been on TV last night, it might have been 20 or 30 years ago perhaps.

What was the last movie that you saw? Because I'm going to test a theory on you that I have. Now I enjoy watching a good movie from time to time, as many of you no doubt do.

But my theory is that in Hollywood movies, there's only three basic plots. Now, the movie that you saw last will be the one exception to this rule.

[1 : 11] But I think that allowing for variations, they all pretty much fit one of these three scenarios. Scenario number one. Boy meets girl. Boy likes girl.

Girl likes boy. But unfortunately, between them and true happiness stands, you fill in the gap. It's different in different movies.

But fortunately, this insurmountable obstacle is overcome in 90 minutes, and it all ends happily ever after. Scenario number two. Now this follows scenario number one pretty much exactly, except that the insurmountable obstacle is not overcome.

This is a sad movie. It becomes ever more depressing, and finally, tragically, ends with a death, or perhaps even a big boat sinking.

Scenario number three. Betrayal. This is the most gripping plot variation, I think. And it transpires something like this.

[2 : 15] There's a problem, a big problem, but enter the hero. Now this usually male and muscular hero, who gets paid about 20 million a film or so, gets to the heart of the problem, and he's helped by a number of actors who don't have to be paid as much.

But just as things are looking up, one of the hero's supposed friends turns out to be crooked. A meeting transpires between the supposed friend and the villain who's been causing all of the problems.

The friend betrays the hero, and the seemingly invincible hero is killed, or has his credibility ruined. Or so it seems, because of course, as we all know, the hero is not really dead and gone, but makes a glorious comeback to the astonishment of the villain, who's vanquished forever.

Sound familiar? Well, it should do, but not from a movie, but because this script is the real-life event which dramatically altered the course of history and made this crooked friend and his actions synonymous with betrayal for us.

Humanity, us, we have a big problem, sin and its effects. Enter Jesus into the world. He gets to the heart of the problem, gathers a band of followers, and things are looking up.

[3 : 48] A new existence seems not just possible, but imminent. But the authorities don't like him and gain an ally in Judas, a supposed trusted and loyal disciple.

Jesus is betrayed, and everyone deserts him. Now, in the coming week's sermons, we'll see a spectacular real-life comeback, the really good bit.

But for now, let's take a close look at this low point for humanity, the betrayal of the Son of God.

Now, if you'd like to follow along, we're going to be looking at the reading from Matthew, which is on page 809 of the Bibles in the pews.

It's page 809, Matthew chapter 26, and beginning at verse 47. And the tension has been building in Matthew's account of the events surrounding Jesus.

Over time, the opposition to Jesus has been clearly defined, and now this opposition is conspiring to bring Jesus down. The Jewish leaders are outraged by Jesus' teaching, his miracles, and his

popular following, and they plot to arrest and kill him.

[5 : 11] Then, fortunately, they find an informant on the inside, Judas. An agreement takes place, and is sealed with the now proverbial 30 pieces of silver.

However, Judas is looking for an opportunity. At the Passover meal, Jesus foretells this betrayal, and Judas disappears out of the picture for the rest of the night, no doubt nervously wondering just how much Jesus knew.

Where did Judas go? What has he been up to in this time? Meanwhile, Jesus takes his disciples outside the city, and spends time anguishing about his fate while his followers sleep.

Then, suddenly, Judas reappears. The hour is at hand. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Jesus' betrayer is at hand, and while he's still speaking, Judas and the crowd turn up. Jesus has perhaps foreseen the arresting crowd coming through the darkness of the hillside. Maybe making noises of a mob. A large crowd. A crowd with swords and clubs sent from the Jewish leaders.

[6 : 33] A large crowd, probably including the temple guards used by the Jews to keep local law and order. Maybe even some Roman soldiers. A few hangers-on, perhaps.

Why so big? Why do they need a large crowd? Were they afraid of Jesus? I suppose, to their way of thinking, perhaps they had a good reason for this.

Jesus had, after all, undeniably performed some spectacular, inexplicable miracles. He also had a large, popular following. Did they perhaps think he was secretly planning a violent rebellion? Well, the priests and the elders, the Jewish leaders, certainly didn't endanger themselves by coming along too. But at the forefront, leading the way, the main focus of Matthew's writing is Judas.

Judas, one of the twelve. One of the twelve who'd given three years in the prime of his life to this man, Jesus, and his mission.

[7 : 41] One of twelve who'd left his job, probably a quite secure job, a job for a lifetime, left his family and friends, his community, his life, left it all.

Judas, who'd seen astounding miracles, life-changing teaching, who knew Jesus revealed as the Messiah, the one that the whole country had been waiting expectantly for for hundreds of years. Judas, trusted by the other disciples as treasurer, would you believe? Not just another face in the crowds, a hanger-on, not even one of the seventy who were specially taught, but one of the twelve, the closest followers.

Betrayal right at the very heart. The betrayer. The gospel writers often don't give Judas a name, but a title, an infamous title, a title that draws out the evil of his actions.

Matthew uses the word betray ten times in this chapter to make his point clear. The betrayer. We still react to betrayal when we see it take place.

[8 : 53] I remember late last year turning on the news one night and being shocked at the headline, Cheryl Curnow joins the Labour Party. I thought, what is this?

Surely not. A key member, in fact the leader, of one party going over to an opposing party. How can this be? Caused a big stir at the time.

And yet this is only politics. How must Jesus and the disciples have felt with this betrayal to arrest and death? Perhaps you can recall other incidences of betrayal.

Maybe it's even taken place in your life. But why would Judas do it? Why would he throw it all away? Turn on his leader, his teacher, the one with whom he'd been through so much.

Was it the money? Well, John recounts that Judas had been stealing from the common fund that the disciples kept. Perhaps he was bitter at the waste he perceived in the perfume recently poured on Jesus.

[10 : 02] Perfume worth a year's salary. Thirty, maybe forty thousand dollars worth of perfume in a bottle. That's a lot of money. Maybe it made him bitter. He did take money for the betrayal after all.

Or was it perhaps disillusionment with where this whole Jesus movement was beginning to head? Had his high hopes in the beginning been dashed when he saw that things weren't going the way he thought best?

Or was he perhaps trying to goad Jesus into taking some action? Whatever his motives, and we can never be sure about this, no attempt is made to gloss over his actions and his culpability.

True, we know this was in God's purposes, but Judas acted as the betrayer and is forever remembered as such. And his unfortunate end was a hopeless suicide.

But did it really have to be that way? Jesus' response to his betrayal is very interesting. Judas has betrayed him with a kiss. He's taken a greeting of friendship and made to stab in the back.

[11:15] But Jesus says to him, friend, do what you're here to do. Friend, he calls Judas. Friend, perhaps a reminder of their past friendship.

Or an accusation. Aren't you a friend? Didn't we just share an intimate meal together? What about all the good times? A challenge. Friend, what are you doing?

an offer of grace. Friend. A reminder of a relationship that can still be restored.

It's not too late. This offer of friendship is still available. This is a great encouragement to us because despite the worst that we can do, Jesus never takes away the hand of friendship.

The offer is never withdrawn. You might think that God could never even bear to look at you, that your past is somehow too horrible for him.

[12:19] Friend, he offers you a new beginning. Then the crowd came and laid hands on Jesus and arrested him. Suddenly, one of those with Jesus put his hand on his sword, drew it, and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear.

Well, at this point, I guess the disciples seem to wake up. What's happening? We've got Judas, one of their mates, this crowd, the arrest. And someone puts two and two together, and the awful truth suddenly dawns on them.

Now, you've got to remember, as well, that they've only just been woken up. I don't know what you're like when you're woken up, but I'm not so good. And I've been getting plenty of practice out the last few weeks with a new baby.

It takes me a little while to figure out what's happening in the middle of the night when I'm woken by screams. Well, the disciples are having what appears to them to be a nightmare.

They're confused, they're tired, and they're not entirely with it. But they've seen enough with this arrest of Jesus to act. One of them strikes a blow for freedom, or so he thinks.

[13:34] Now, John's account tells us that this is the disciple Peter. Yet I imagine that we would probably suspect it to be Peter without even having him named. The actions, bold, impetuous, but not that well thought through, courage which quickly vanishes.

Peter, bold to try and walk on water to Jesus, but then he looked down and sank. Peter, the first to call Jesus the Messiah, but then immediately rebuked by Jesus for telling this Messiah that he didn't know what he was doing.

Peter, who says, though everyone will desert you, I will not. But then he runs away. Plenty of passion, but not always too much common sense and not always that reliable.

And not too flashed with a sword it seems, because his best effort almost entirely misses the target and just chops off an ear. But Jesus immediately calms the situation.

Luke tells us that he healed the ear. That must have been pretty amazing. Wasn't that in itself enough to convince the arresting crowd of their mistake? Perhaps this crowd thought of taking the others as well, but I guess it was one thing to grab a single peaceful man, another altogether to grab 11 who were scared and ready to fight.

[15:03] Anyway, they soon fled into the darkness and confusion. Jesus quickly rebukes this action of Peter. Put your sword back into its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.

Now Peter, as many times before, unlike Judas and like the other disciples, has misunderstood Jesus' mission. His zeal was misplaced.

Jesus' mission is not that of a conquering warlord who is going to subject everything to his authority. force has no place in the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

His way is offered freely, but not imposed. Now this of course is not implying that civil authority is unnecessary, that's another matter altogether. But swords have no place in Jesus' gospel.

Besides which had Peter forgotten who Jesus was. This is the man he had seen walk on water, not just in an ad on TV, but in real life.

[16:17] Someone who calmed a raging storm, casts out demons, supernaturally escape a different mob at Nazareth. Jesus demonstrates just how ridiculous their attempts at resistance are.

Do you think I cannot appeal to my father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? One legion was made up of twelve thousand foot soldiers, not to mention horsemen.

Twelve legions is such an overwhelming, vastly superior force as to show the silliness of Peter's actions. Of course Jesus could respond, but that's not the plan.

There's something bigger in the pipeline. Essentially though, we see Peter and the others far more ready to fight than to pray.

Ready to take up the sword, but not ready to take up the cross. Too quickly under pressure, they forget their previous confident assertions and flee.

[17 : 25] I vividly remember a day in my teens as a young Christian, and I'd recently been to a youth group camp and become boldly confident in my ability to follow Christ.

I could do it anywhere, any time. And this day I was asked by a girl, why do you go to church? You don't really believe all that stuff, do you? No, I replied, all the time wanting to say yes, but I couldn't do it.

My confidence vanished all too quickly. I forgot my previous confident assertions and fled the scene. And I'm sure that many others of you have had similar times.

It's also sobering to see that our best intentions and our enthusiasm are not by themselves enough without thinking whether they're focused in the correct direction of God's intentions.

Fortunately, unlike Judas, the postscript to this story is a happy one. The end result for the disciples is a comeback, a new understanding of Jesus' ways and a wonderful example for us to follow.

[18 : 43] Jesus continues speaking, but how then would the scriptures be fulfilled which say it must happen in this way? If I appealed to my father, if I gathered all the angels in the world and showed my glory so that you all fell to the ground in terror, if I split this church building and opened with lightning, well then what?

For the scriptures must be fulfilled. This is the key to Jesus' actions and purposes throughout his life and especially in the events leading up to his death and resurrection.

Everything that's happening, strange as it may have seemed, is a part of God's grand plan, a divine necessity. Jesus has already asked earlier that night if there might be any possibility of another way, but he willingly submits himself to the Father's will.

He has prepared himself with solitude and prayer, reassured of God's purposes and strengthened. He's calm and peaceful, whilst the disciples who prepared with sleep panic around him.

And while knowing that this must happen, Jesus still questions the arresting crowd. Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit?

[20 : 06] Day after day I sat in the temple teaching and you didn't arrest me then. Why are you sending the riot squad out at night after a peaceful figure who's appeared every day in public down at Bourke Street Mall or something, preaching day after day?

The police don't arrest him then. Jesus calls attention to the questionable legality and the lack of legitimacy of their actions. He's obviously not a criminal in hiding, running from the law.

So why all this stealth and underhandedness? Were they scared of the masses? Scared of public opinion if they arrested Jesus in full view? Might the light of day show up too many flaws in their approach that they hoped to hide under the cover of darkness?

An optimist, and I'm an optimist, might dare to hope that perhaps a few in this crowd heard Jesus' challenge and were shamed at what they were doing, perhaps even later to turn and receive his generous offer of new life.

Yet sadly we suspect most were too blind by this stage to observe anything more than their own preconceptions. Their blinkers stopped them from seeing the very Messiah that they thought themselves waiting for.

[21 : 32] But all this has taken place so that the scriptures of the prophets may be fulfilled.

Matthew goes to some lengths in his accounts of Jesus to show the fulfillment of scripture in his life.

As Isaiah prophesied hundreds of years earlier, he was numbered with the transgressors. Ironically, even as Jesus talks of scriptural fulfillment, the disciples flee and in the process fulfill another scripture from Zechariah.

No doubt the Jews thought themselves very clever in organizing this arrest. Yet they were simply another unwitting part of God's preconceived plan.

During this account of Jesus' betrayal, we've seen the necessity for his death and his resurrection. Ever since God had created, the flaws at the very centre of our being were and are constantly revealed, thus fracturing our relationship with our creator.

Jesus' closest friends and followers betray him, desert him. The supposed keepers of the faith in Israel arrest their Lord and crucify him.

[22 : 52] Yet through incredible love and mercy, God used this as a part of the fulfillment of his plan to rescue us and to restore our relationship with him.

Would we have been any different from Judas, the betrayer, Peter, the deserter, the Jews who couldn't see through their self-imposed blindness?

I suspect that despite our best intentions, you, like me, have betrayed, have deserted, have failed to see Jesus.

But the good news of the Easter account is that he still says friend, an offering to us of peace and forgiveness anew.

Ryle summarises this passage. Jesus came on purpose to fulfil the promises of Old Testament scriptures and by fulfilling them to provide salvation for the world.

[23 : 58] To do this, he became a willing sufferer. He was taken, tried, condemned and crucified entirely of his own free will.

But there is much encouragement in this. Jesus, the willing sufferer, must surely be a willing saviour. The almighty son of God who allowed men to bind him and lead him away captive when he might have just prevented them with a word.

He must surely be full of readiness to save the souls that flee to him. Once more then, let us learn to trust him and not be afraid.

Let's pray. Dear Lord God, at various times each of us have betrayed you or deserted you or failed to see you.

We ask for your forgiveness. Yet we thank you that you in your great mercy somehow include this in your plan. That you call us friend.

[25 : 10] That you offer forgiveness to us. That you rescue us. Thank you for this, Lord. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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