

THE MAN WHO MISSED THE RESURRECTION

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He had risen. But the other man who died on Good Friday lay behind, covered with dirt. His death a defeat.

I know it is traditional on Easter Sunday morning to preach more specifically on the open tomb. But I have felt impressed of the Lord on this Easter Sunday that I should share by way of contrast the story of the man who on Easter Sunday morning lay in a sepulcher, buried in the ground. It is as if his story when compared to Christ is as though you would walk into a room where there was only two paintings. You look at one and it is filled with the sunrise. The landscape of greenery dotted with the brightness of colors of a thousand different hues. And you look at that glorious painting which is the painting of the empty tomb and the risen Christ. And your life is filled with joy and rejoicing for you know that all is well. But in that same room you look and there is another painting. A painting with dark thunderclouds. With a certain kind of ominous gloom which hangs heavy upon the ground. The darkness so thick that one can feel it as if to cut it. It is in contrasting these two paintings that we get a real message from Easter.

The story of the man who lay buried in the ground is found briefly for us in Matthew 27:3. When Judas his betrayer saw that he was condemned he repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priest and the elders saying, 'I have sinned in betraying innocent blood.' They said, 'What is that to us? See to it yourself.' And throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple he departed and he went out and hanged himself."

Not everyone who comes in contact with Jesus partakes of Easter. Simultaneous with Jesus' passion is Judas' death. While Jesus is being forcibly driven to the cross yet of his own accord, Judas is running across a potters field, a claying field, to find somewhere a hanging branch where he might take the sash from his garment wrap it around the tree and himself and hang in ignominy. Where that sash is broken and Judas falling, dies a jagged death upon the ground.

In the same hours when Jesus is going to the cross Judas is going into eternity.

As I look at the story of Judas, I discover that I and you have maybe more in common with Judas than at times we like to acknowledge. As we look at the story of Easter and the whole events of Christ's passion we ask ourselves the question when we see Judas, Where am I with Jesus this Easter?

How does a person miss Easter? How can you miss the resurrection? We have in the story of the gospel a man who somehow managed to miss it. To miss the greatest event of all history. How did he do it? We would have to say that no one starts out deliberately to miss Easter. Judas did not start out deliberately to miss Easter.

When Jesus first called him, Judas was a willing disciple. He had been with Jesus from the time when John the Baptizer appeared in the wilderness and the Son of God was baptized in that river. Over three years he had been with Jesus beginning from the time of John's baptism until the time of Jesus with his multitude of disciples after an all night of prayer called the totality of the disciples to himself and selected from the multitude of followers 12 whom he named apostles. Judas was one of the twelve who made the cut. He must have had the feeling that you have had

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in your student days of making a grade. Or getting admission into some school, which you have desired to be in. With this man not have sent word back to his family, "I have been accepted in the school of Jesus. I am one of the twelve." His fire and zeal for the Lord are no doubt as fresh and evident as the other eleven who themselves had been chosen on that day.

The Lord quickly gathers the twelve to himself and sends them out with power to preach the good news, power to heal the sick, power even to cast out demons. And Judas has a ministry along with the others. It is through his words of the good news that people themselves believe in Jesus.

He didn't start out deliberately to betray. After all he saw the miracles and heard the teachings of our Lord. He was there when the Lord had turned water into wine at Cana. He was seasick in that boat on the lake of Galilee when the disciples feared that they would perish in the storm. He was one of those who served the 5000 men and women plus on that day when Jesus broke the loaves and the fish and gave it to the disciples for the crowd. It was he who also had a basket of fragments left over which he had gathered. He heard the great parables. He was a direct party to listening to the story of the prodigal son, that memorable story which is etched upon our consciousness as human beings. That greatest story perhaps ever told in the whole of the world. He was there when Jesus told the good Samaritan story. He was there when the Sermon on the Mount was preached and the beatitudes flowed forth from the Lord's lips.

So proven was his ability as a follower of Jesus that he even was selected by Jesus to be treasurer to the group. Jesus in selecting Judas to be the treasurer chosen him even over Matthew who had distinguished himself in his private life as one who had been entrusted with funds. It was Matthew who was the tax collector. But Judas some had abilities even beyond Matthew. He was chosen to carry the apostolic purse.

He did not at the beginning think of his role as a betrayer. He did not see from the beginning the cross looming ahead or the eventuality of the resurrection.

I don't think any one of us starts out in life with the deliberate intention to, so to speak, blow it. We don't start out with an intention to somehow make a failure of things. When a person begins a marriage they don't start it with the intention of seeing it fall apart. When a person starts on a career he doesn't start it from the standpoint of seeing it fail. When you start an academic career, you don't begin from the standpoint of seeing yourself as a drop out. But somehow over the course of time Judas does drop out.

I think it is well that at Easter time to look back upon the goals which we have set for ourselves in life as human beings. If you're an average human being like me one of the things you want from life is happiness or a better word in the Christian vernacular is joy. You want peace. You want right relationships with other people. I think most importantly of all you want relationship with God.

How is it then that those things which we set out to attain somehow fall by the way and we wind up becoming a different person than when we began. We wind up disillusioned as Judas. We do wrong to the story of Judas if we treat him as some sort of devil from the beginning or some sort of malevolent creature. He was not that. He was an ordinary human being like you and me. How did he miss the resurrection? He did not start out deliberately to miss it any more than any one of us would start out deliberately to miss the good news of Jesus Christ.

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We know by looking at his story that one reason he missed the resurrection was that he did not deal with disappointments in respect to Jesus. Judas evidently was a revolutionary. He was a person who looked for a political kingdom. He was one who expected the Messiah to arm his company, turn them into a militia group, cause them to overthrow the Roman authority. To have Christ enshrined in the seat of David as a political ruler.

Jesus somehow disappoints Judas because Judas has a conception in his own life of what God should be like. How Jesus must come through. When Jesus does not come through as Judas has wanted, the break begins. We do not know the turning point in Judas' life when he first began to turn away from the Lord. When the disappointment first began to be etched upon his consciousness.

I suspect that it may have come at Caesarea-Philippi, some year and a half to two years into Jesus' ministry when he asked his disciples, Who do you say that I am? And Peter had replied, You are the Messiah, the Son of God. And Jesus then had turned and said to Peter and to the others, that he was going to the cross. Maybe it was at that time that the disenchantment began in Judas' life. And that growing disenchantment with Jesus finally overflowed in the house of a person of Bethany, Simon the leper, John 12, the Saturday before Christ's passion week Jesus is setting there and a woman comes and pours expensive ointment upon Jesus. This coziness of love did not warm the fires of Judas' revolutionary heart. It was the string that snapped within him. The growing disappointment now culminated in an act against the one whom he had owned as Lord and Master.

Look at Judas, and look at the way we respond to life. How easy it is to turn away from Jesus when he does not come through as we have told him to come through. When we have spelled out specifically in our prayers or our agenda of action for life master and Lord, this is what you must do to prove yourself to me. But only he comes in a way in which he chooses to come, rather than the way we are insisting that he manifest himself in our own lives.

Jesus come into this room! Materially appear and speak to me and I will believe in you! But he remains this invisible one. This one whom we cannot now reach out and touch as Thomas. This one whom we cannot now verbally hear speaking to us. He remains in the record. He remains witnessed to by the faithful spirit, which in our hearts keeps suggesting to us he is Lord. He is risen!

We turn away like Judas when we impose upon him criteria of acceptance, which he himself has chosen not to use. Disappointment. Have you ever been disappointed with Jesus? Has there ever been a time when you felt he should have come through and he did not? Judas had that experience. Judas was not the only one however to have that experience. All of the others in the apostolic group had that moment when Jesus too disappointed them. When Jesus went to the cross against their insistence. But as we'll suggest in a few moments those others than Judas somehow came to grips with dealing with their disappointments.

If we're to come to grips and hang around to see Easter there must be that hanging on knowing that if we close our life in the top of the ninth inning we will never see the outcome of the game. Jesus always comes up to bat last. Judas simply didn't hang around for the end. Jesus promises that all disappointments will be dealt with. That every grief in life will be taken away. That is

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his word. The word of a gentleman. But the word of the Lord. We err if we quit in our disappointment.

Judas missed Easter also because he did not put away moral sin in his life. The gospel of John tells us that when Judas protested at that house of Simon the leper when the woman poured the anointing on Jesus which was worth 300 working days wages. Roughly in our currency, she dumped about \$15,000 worth of perfume on the Lord's head. She was sensitive to the Lord. She was the only one who really believed him when he said I'm going to die. Everybody else was protesting and saying, No, Lord that's not going to happen to you. But she believed it. She said I've only got a short time. I must do something for him while he is alive. I must do something, which will last. I know I can't give him anything because he can't take it with him. But I will give him what I can. And she anointed him.

Judas sits there and he protests. In his protests we see him both as a thief and a hypocrite. He is a thief in that John illumines this occasion by telling us that he regularly stole from the bag. And he is a hypocrite in that he cloaks his real motive in protesting the anointing of Jesus by saying this should have been given to the poor.

How easy it is to stand in the hypocritical role. To say of persons who are following the Lord. "I live as good a life as you do. I'm as religious as anybody else." Only to find that often our protests are simply a cloaking for the emptiness and moral sin in our own life.

Judas did not start out big. I don't think anyone starts out to sin real big. People start out to sin gradually. As we become capable of greater and greater acts of love so we become capable of greater and greater acts of wickedness. Judas who began his career of moral sin by stealing from the bag eventually betrays the Lord. Such is the progression or retrogression of his development as a person. Incredible that this could happen. But it did. To the one closest to the Lord. A person who stole.

What did he do with the money? Did he go out and buy a new Jaguar? A new camel? Honestly, I scratched my head over that. Why was Judas stealing? What was he doing with the money? It's obvious from the gospels that none of the other disciples at the time knew that he was stealing. In fact when the Lord sent him out of the upper room on the night of his betrayal all of the others simply thought Judas was going to get more refreshments or food for the meal. Something had run short and Judas who always took care of these things, being the money keeper of the group, the purchasing agent, he was just going out to get something. Nobody suspected it. There were no new clothes that he was wearing. No money that he was spouting in his billfold saying look how rich I'm getting. Nothing of this.

Somehow he was concealing his moral sin. Concealing it and concealing it. But Judas shows us that there is a time when moral sin can be concealed no more. For there is a day when all things become evident. If we persist in moral sin then inevitably we run the risk and indeed the eventuality happens to us that we miss Easter for the message of Easter is, if you believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead you will be saved and how can you believe in your heart if your heart is filled with disobedience and moral sin?

Judas also missed Easter because he did not resist Satan. Luke 22:3 tells us that Satan entered Judas. He's the only person in scripture of whom that precise terminology is employed. Directly entered Judas.

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How does this happen? No doubt over a period of time through moral temptation Judas had let the enemy continually enter his heart. Until such a job as he became capable of doing that awesome deed which he did. The scriptures tell us to be alert to Satan's deives. To resist him and he would flee from us. But by not resisting Judas places himself in that role eventually being possessed to do the enemy's designs.

Sometimes people say when looking at a figure, particularly someone like Judas, a person who has had a place of spiritual prominence that he had a sudden fall. We knew him as a person who was so spiritually correct and all of a sudden this happened in his life. Judas' story tells us that no fall is sudden. That it is preceded by many small acts of disobedience and error until the tragedy becomes evident. The crisis of the moment is decided by the whole tenor of his life. And the scripture explicitly speaks to each one of us that we're in conflict on the one hand between a real God and on the other hand a real Satan.

The message of Easter is that there is a real supernatural world. The fact that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead says flatly to us that everything which he talked about is a reality. He talked about the devil. He talked about fallen angels. He talked about heaven. He talked about righteousness. He talked about death. He talked about hell. Everything which he said comes crystal clear and true because of the event of Easter morning. So it is possible in your life. It's a very real thing for us to know what it's like to have the tempter stand at our door and seek entrance into our life to do the wrong.

Judas missed Easter not because he started out to miss it. Not because he had a goal of frustrating and ruining his life. He missed Easter by not dealing with his disappointments in respect to Jesus. He missed it because he did not put away moral sin. He missed it because he did not resist Satan.

And what is the after effect in Judas' life? I think there are three, which the New Testament spells out. One is the word which Jesus pronounces of him in Mark 14:21 "Better for that man if he had never been born." What an end to life! What a way to go. To have at the end of life to have you or someone else say of you, Better that that person had never lived. Wasn't there a sadness in the last weeks of the passing of Howard Hughes? A man who had accumulated everything and at the end of his life seems to have nothing at all. I would not be so audacious to say of him that better that that may never lived. That would be presumptuous and judgmental of me. And I don't think would be fair. But it certainly points out in the death of even a prominent person who has had everything that life could give in the way of material advantages that when one comes to the end of life and has missed Easter as far as we know what hope is there? The grave is the end. All paths do lead to the grave. No path leads from the grave.

In Jesus' ministry it's all paths lead from the grave because of the resurrection. What a terrible way to end to have said of you, It was better that you had never lived.

Another thing that was said of Judas is that his place was empty. Acts 1:20. It describes what happens when the apostles after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus are gathered together in the upper room and they say as they look at the psalms, It is necessary that someone else be elected to fulfill Judas' place for his habitation is desolate. A poetic way of saying his place is empty.

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What place? The place at the table when the twelve could draw up their chairs. The place on the day of Pentecost where the apostles stood up with Peter and the great message of Easter is proclaimed. Jesus Christ lives! That place is empty. That place of service in the church, the place that was reserved for Judas is empty. How many empty places are there because a person has missed the resurrection, missed Easter.

I think of families that a child has gone away from the Lord. The place is empty. I think of families where a partner has gone away from the Lord. The place which they were designed to fill. The place of husband/wife. Father or mother is empty.

Judas' place is empty. It's a tragedy. The thing which God has called you to be in life, the thing that God has called you to do which you could only do if you have seen the resurrection, that place that God has for you is set aside and empty.

I think the third thing which happens to Judas is that he did not believe he could be forgiven. That I guess is the one ray of light in this whole message because that's the one ray of light in the whole story of the cross and in the resurrection. He did not believe he could be forgiven.

On the morning in which he had betrayed Christ he came into the place where the chief priests were in the temple area, threw down his thirty pieces. The text of the gospel, which we have read today, says he repented. But then he went out and hanged himself. What a tragedy! He was sorry for what he did but he did not know, if at least if he did know he did not act upon securing forgiveness. He only felt sorry. He only felt he had somehow botched it up. He had betrayed innocent blood. From that point of so to speak repentance he goes out and hangs himself.

Could I ask you in your mind to jump with me to another possibility that lay before Judas? Instead of running out to that potter's field where he would hang himself suppose instead that he had gone the other direction. Suppose that he had decided to follow Jesus to the cross. Suppose he intersects Jesus at the cross, at the precise moment after Jesus had been nailed there and the cross had been raised erection that Golgotha hill. Suppose Judas had been with John and the women who stood at the foot of the cross. What would Judas have heard had he stood at the cross? He would have heard the first word of the Lord. "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." Forgive. Even Judas could be forgiven.

How do I know that? Look at another disciple, Simon Peter for example. He too betrayed the Lord. He too denied his Lord. But he stayed around long enough for the bottom of the ninth. One of the great texts of the gospel is simply that word "The Lord appeared unto Peter." The Lord looked at him and the Lord appeared to him. Peter's denial is forgiven. And Peter is transformed from being the weak denier of Jesus to the one who on the day of Pentecost stands up and affirms him like Jesus has never been affirmed in all of human history. If Jesus could do that with Peter who denied him he could have also done it with Jesus who betrayed him.

Wouldn't it have been an amazing story if Judas would have waited? If he had gone to the cross? Can you imagine Judas as an apostle of Jesus Christ saying as he proclaimed in the various churches, which were founded in the Mediterranean world of the first century, "He forgave me. He restored me, a person who had betrayed him."

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That's exactly what would have happened to Judas if he would have come to the Lord and said, "Forgive me!" He didn't need to lose his place. He didn't need to have it said of him, better that this man was never born.

And neither do you. For that cross on Good Friday means that Jesus forgave you of all your sin. But the benefit of that cross can never be applied to your life if you go away from the cross simply feeling sorry or if you never get to the cross at all. The benefits of the cross are applied when we look to Jesus and we say, "I too, Lord, have sinned. Forgive me." Those who experience Christ's forgiveness are around on Easter day to see the empty tomb and the risen Lord.

And you too, God wants to see the real meaning of Easter. There is no deed, which you have done. There is no blemish which has accrued to you in your life but what cannot be forgiven. No false start which you have made that cannot be remade. No blemish which cannot be erased. God forgives you in Christ Jesus. If only Judas had come to the cross. If only each of us will come to the cross we will see the resurrection.

We're especially made serious today Lord, on this holy day of holy days. When we think of the example which your scripture has brought for us today. What a contrast, Lord. To see a person lost in the light of so great an opportunity to see you as risen. We take his example as warning to our own heart lest there be in us an unbelieving heart which would turn away from you because of disappointment or turn away from you because of moral sin or turn away from you because they have not resisted Satan. Cause this day, Lord, as we yield to you in it to be a day of hope and a day of life. I thank you especially in this moment that there is not a person here that is somehow outside the possibility of forgiveness. All sins may be forgiven except that one sin which no one in this room has committed. For each one in this room is here because the Spirit of God has drawn that individual to celebrate this most glorious of days. And each of us here have that renewed opportunity to experience your healing and forgiveness and to hear you say of us "come into my family." And to hear you say to us, "I am risen!" So we praise you for this glorious day. In Jesus' name. Amen.