

*Peter & Judas- a comparison of two who betrayed Jesus –
Yet two different destinies - 1 in Heaven 1 in Hell*

A Tale of Two Sorrows - Matthew 26-27 - John MacArthur

A couple of weeks ago I had the wonderful joy of being at the high school camp, Regeneration camp down in New Mexico with 900 high school kids. Just a delight, just a wonderful time, and I think there were four or five hundred from Grace Church and then others from other churches around the southwest. And I put together a message just for them, just going through some things in my reading in the New Testament, and the Lord kind of laid on my heart a message, and I presented it to them. And they responded very well. And as a result of that, Austin Duncan, who wields a lot of power around here - our high school... our college pastor now...former high school pastor - came to me and said, "You have to preach that at Grace, because you all need to know what your children heard at camp."

So I said, "Well if you think I should do that, I'll be glad to. So I'm going to do that this morning. Open your Bible to *Matthew chapter 26, Matthew chapter 26.*

Now one of the real delights in speaking to high school kids is they have the courtesy to talk if they're not interested, which lets you know exactly where you are. You don't have that courtesy; you look like you're interested even when you're bored to death. That's just kind of an adult thing to do. But the feedback from them was wonderful, and it was a privilege and a joy to minister to them for a few days down there. And I have to tell you, you ought to be very thankful for the ministry that so many folks have in the lives of your children and your young people here at Grace Church. The medical doctor that I was referring to earlier, Carlan, has served on high school staff and was there running a triage center for us at high school camp. It's that kind of a camp. It's pretty crazy. And delighted to serve the young people there with his formidable skills. So we are very grateful for the folks that are investing in the lives of the young people here in our church. I know in my own family, I'm deeply grateful for their influence on our children through the years, and our grandchildren.

But as we come to the twenty-sixth chapter of the book of Matthew, I want to introduce to you two familiar men and maybe introduce them to you in a way that you haven't seen them in the past. It's a tale of two men in this chapter. While when you read *Matthew 26* and on in to *chapter 27*, you are focused on the Lord Jesus Christ who dominates these chapters as He goes to the cross. These are the accounts of His arrest and mock trial, and scourging, and execution on the cross. Because the light is so bright on Christ, because He's such a dominating figure, you can lose sight of a tale of two men that is going on at the very same time, and it's a very remarkable, remarkable tale. It fascinates me that these two men are the secondary characters in this chapter, and there really are no others. It's Jesus and these two men. You know them very well. They both had the most unique privilege and opportunity ever given to a human being ever, never to be given to anyone before or since. Both were personally called by Jesus to follow Him. Both answered the call and followed Him 24/7 for three years, every day all day and every night all night, virtually. Both declared repeatedly to Him and to those around them their personal devotion to the Lord Jesus. Both were personally trained by Jesus for ministry. Both were students of Jesus; they were in that all-day-long classroom called discipleship. Both of them were being trained for ministry. Both of them were taught by Jesus. The unparalleled teacher, the most profound teacher that ever walked on earth. They were taught by Him by ways that they could understand that which was profound and unknown to the world. They were taught by precept, proposition, and they were taught by example to know the Word of God and to know the will of God and to know the truth concerning all things. They were given a divine worldview.

They were taught how to respond to the truth of God and live it out obediently. Both men saw the miracles of Jesus every day throughout the duration of His ministry. They saw His power over demons. They saw His power over disease. They saw His power over death. They saw His power over nature. They saw His intellectual power to deflect every assault on Him from His enemies that came verbally as they tried to catch Him in His words. They saw the mastery that He had of the language and of truth and thought.

Both men heard the Lord answer every important, penetrating, profound, theological question ever asked of Him. And they, no doubt, heard Him answer questions that no one asked, and the answers were always true and profound and clear. Both of them were daily confronted with their sinfulness. Both of them were daily reminded that they had fallen as the whole human race had and desperately needed forgiveness and salvation. They were very aware of that. Both of them understood that Jesus had come to proclaim good news to sinners.

Both of them received and used divine power, power from Jesus, and authority from Jesus was delegated to them so that both of them were enabled to do miracles and to exercise power and authority over demons. Eventually both of them were sent out to preach. Both of them became preachers, and they preached that the Messiah Jesus was the Savior and the Son of God and the King. And they shared all the experiences together for those amazing three years. They were exposed to the Lord Jesus Christ in exactly the same way, the same experiences, the same period of time.

There's more. They both were sinners and they knew it. They knew it well. They both felt profound guilt about their sin, overwhelming guilt about their sin. There's more. They both were taken over by Satan, both of them, to take up Satan's cause against the Lord Jesus. And in the end, they both betrayed Him, publicly, violently, strongly - openly they betrayed Him. And they did that at the end of that three years, just before He was crucified.

As a result of what they did, both were sad, sorry, in fact they agonized over their betrayals, both of them did. One was so agonized that he killed himself. The other was so agonized that he repented. Two men whose lives were side by side in the presence of the Son of God. One of them, in spite of his wicked betrayal of the Savior, is considered so honorable and so exalted a person that some of you are named after him. In fact, people have been named after him since the first century. And people will continue to be named after this betrayer. He is loved, his name is honored, and his name is Peter.

The word doesn't mean anything particularly important; it's the word for "stone." The other man is considered so dishonorable, the other betrayer is so despicable that no one has his name. You don't know anyone who has his name. You don't know anyone's dog who has his name. He is hated. He is reviled. He is rejected. He is Judas and his name means "praised." Such an elevated name for such a dishonorable man.

One of these men we who belong to Christ will meet because that betrayer is in heaven. The other, you who reject Christ may meet because he's in hell. One of these preachers ended a suicide, hanging himself and not even doing that successfully - book of Acts tells us that his end came when he fell and was disemboweled on the rocks below. Whether the branch broke, the rope broke, or the knot was inadequate, he was a tragic suicide, eternally banished. The other ended his life a saint, crucified upside down and eternally blessed. Two men side by side for three years, experiencing exactly the same thing in the presence of the glorious Son of God, together ended up as separated as two human beings can be, one in heaven and one in hell.

That separation may be portrayed a little bit in the listing of the apostles in the four places the apostles are listed in the New Testament. Peter is the first name and Judas is the last. Even there, they are separated as

far as they can be. One highly honored in heaven, the other highly dishonored in hell - what an amazing contrast. And they both had the same experience with Jesus Christ. Their lives, in that sense, couldn't have been more similar, and their ends couldn't have been more dissimilar.

What made the difference? Why does Peter end up in heaven and Judas in hell? Well the answer is very simple - they had different attitudes toward Jesus Christ, that's what it comes down to. Salvation isn't by works; they did the same works. It isn't by knowledge; they had the same knowledge. They were given the same information.

Salvation can be basically boiled down to a person's attitude toward Jesus Christ. To put it simply, Peter loved Him and Judas hated Him, and they came out of the same context. The same sun that melts the wax hardens the clay. Just to contemporize that a little bit, churches are full of the same kinds of people today. Churches are full of Peters and Judases, all hearing the same messages, hearing the same truth, same doctrine, same explanation of Scripture, having the same spiritual experience in the fellowship, seeing the same divine grace and power in the same people's lives, serving together, worshiping together, evangelizing together, and they end up in two extremely different places. Jesus pointed this out when He talked about the wheat and the tares, didn't He? And also in the Sermon on the Mount when He said, "*Many will say unto Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord,' and I'll say, 'Depart from Me, I never knew you.'*"

The story of these two men, two kinds of sorrow really, is found in the *twenty-sixth chapter of Matthew*. Let me take you to that chapter and we're going to cover the whole chapter by moving rapidly. Jesus has just finished His great Second Coming sermon given on the Mount of Olives, the last sermon He gave to His disciples. He has reminded them that He is going to be returning to establish His kingdom; He'll come back in glory. Finishes that up, chapter 26, verse 1, and then says to His disciples, verse 2: "*You know that after two days the Passover is coming and the Son of Man is to be handed over for crucifixion.*" He was the final and only satisfying Passover lamb. He would offer His life at the Passover as the true Passover Lamb, the true sacrifice for sin that God would accept. He is telling them about His coming death. It is very soon.

Passover is coming; in fact, it's coming the next day. The Son of Man is going to be handed over for crucifixion. This isn't the first time He had told them that. He has been talking about that for a long time. If you go all the way back to chapter 16, verse 21, "*From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and be raised up on the third day.*" And that's when, of course, Peter said, "*God, forbid it, Lord, this shall never happen to You.*" And Jesus turned to Peter and said, "*Get behind Me, Satan.*"

But Jesus had been saying all along, "I'm headed for death, I'm headed for crucifixion." He was even specific about the way He would die. So Jesus is saying the time has come and in the meantime, verses 3 to 5 tell us, the rulers of Israel were planning it. They were gathered together in the court of the high priest named Caiaphas, and they plotted together to seize Jesus by stealth and kill Him. So they're working on hatching the plot while Jesus is telling them that it is coming.

At this time, they find themselves in Bethany, according to verse 6, two miles from Jerusalem, east over the Mount of Olives, a little village of Bethany. There were a couple of Christian families there, Simon the leper was one, and no doubt a man who had been healed from leprosy, and Mary, Martha and Lazarus lived in that little village. So Jesus was there in Bethany, and He was at the home of Simon the leper. And a woman came to Him with an alabaster vial, very expensive vial of very costly perfume. This would have been a small fortune in this bottle, and she poured it on His head as He reclined at the table. This was an act of lavish affection and love for the Lord. Verse 8 says,

“The disciples were indignant when they saw this, and they said, ‘*Why this waste? For this perfume might have been sold for a high price and the money given to the poor?*’”

It sounds noble, doesn't it? It sounds really noble. Who would have said that? *John 12:4* says it was Judas. It was Judas. He was the protester. And by the way, this is the first revelation of this man's heart. Oh, earlier in *John 6, verse 70*, Jesus said, “*One of you is a devil,*” but that must have flown by because He didn't say who, and I'm sure because there was zero suspicion among them of each other, they didn't even process it. Here is the first revelation of his character, and there is no suspicion of him whatsoever. He brings it up, “*Why are you wasting this? We could have sold it and given the money to the poor.*” He didn't care about the poor, not at all. Another gospel writer tells us, “*He said this because he had the bag*”-- he had the money. This thing was going downhill fast. Judas had gotten in as a greedy, self-loving, ambitious man who saw Jesus as the means to his own satisfaction. He wanted money; he was driven by greed and avarice and worldliness. He wanted prominence, power. He wanted to gain everything he could gain for himself, and he saw Jesus as the way to do that.

And now Jesus is not talking about a kingdom, not talking about power, not talking about being exalted. He's talking about death. And in verse 12 He takes it a step further and says that what this woman did, in a sense, is symbolic as a preparation for My burial. Jews would anoint bodies. They didn't embalm them, but they would anoint them in burial. Here was like a preliminary symbol of the fact that He was going to be dead and buried. Judas is in a panic. He's got whatever he's got in the bag, and they made him the treasurer. That's how much they trusted him and how little suspicion - virtually none - there was of him as a hypocrite. And now because he knows he's going to get out, he wants to get out with whatever he can. He wishes that this had been sold so the money could go in the bag, because he held the bag and it would just give him back some compensation for having his ladder leaning against the wrong building for three years.

He is crushed. His ambitions are smashed. He is terribly disappointed, and he is angry at Jesus. Verse 14 says, “*One of the twelve,*” and that's how he's always introduced in the four gospels because it's so incredulous that he's in that group and acting this way. “*One of the twelve, named Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, 'What are you willing to give me to betray Him to you?' And they weighed out thirty pieces of silver to him.*” According to *Exodus 21:32* that is the price of a slave.

Please notice the word “betray” in verse 15. “*What are you willing to give me to betray Him to you?*” They were afraid to go arrest Jesus in the middle of the day because He was mobbed by the people and He was popular with the people. They needed to get Him at night, but how could they find Him in the dark of night where there were no lights in the ancient world? Somebody had to reveal where He was. Judas said, “I'll do that for the price of a slave.”

Verse 16, “*from then on he began looking for a good opportunity to betray Jesus.*” Verse 17 introduces us to the Passover on that Thursday night where Jesus gathers to celebrate what had been inaugurated in the twelfth chapter of Exodus - the celebration of the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt. They were going to hold the Passover, celebrate the Passover; they get together for that very event. It's indicated there in verses 17 and following. Verse 20 says, “*Jesus was reclining at a table with the twelve disciples.*” Now out of nowhere, as they were eating, He says, “*Truly I say to you, one of you will betray Me.*” One of you will betray Me.

Shocked beyond imagination. Shock. I could say the same thing today. Some of you will betray Jesus Christ. You will defect. You will deny Him finally and terminally in a group this size. But among the Twelve? One of you will betray Me? There is no suspicion about Judas, they're all deeply grieved. They each one began to say to Him, “*Surely not I, Lord.*” They were more suspicious of themselves than

they were of Him. There was no suspicion directed at Judas. And the Lord answered, *“He who dipped his bread with Me in the bowl is the one who will betray Me.”* One right here at this table. The Old Testament says, *“My own familiar friend, he will betray Me.”*

The Son of Man is to go, verse 24, as it is written of Him, but woe to the man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed. It would have been good for that man if He had not been born. Never having been born--far better fate than eternity in hell. And Judas, keeping up the hypocrisy who was betraying Him, said, *“Surely it is not I, Rabbi.”* Jesus said to him, *“You’ve said it yourself.”* And he is only at the last hour finally exposed as the betrayer.

At this point, John’s gospel tells us Judas was dismissed. John said Satan entered him, *John 13:2 and 27*, Satan entered him and Jesus said, *“Go do what you do quickly.”* And Judas leaves and they have the Passover with Judas gone.

After the Passover, go down to verse 30, *“They sang a hymn and they went out to the Mount of Olives.”* They went out to the Mount of Olives. Passover was done, they went there to pray. And if you go down to verse 36, that’s exactly what happened. They came to Gethsemane which means “olive press.” He told the disciples, *“Sit here while I go over there and pray.”* He took with Him Peter, and James, and John, and began to be grieved and distressed. And you know He went there to pray.

So the disciples are now in Gethsemane. Peter and John a little further in into the Garden. Jesus a little further in, praying alone. And here we pick up the story of Judas after he left.

He goes out and negotiates his deal with the leaders of Israel for 30 pieces of silver. He knows where they are in the familiar place in the Garden on the Mount of Olives and so we pick up the story in verse 45. *“And He came to the disciples and said to them, ‘Are you still sleeping and resting?’”* Remember, they kept sleeping instead of praying. *“Behold the hour is at hand, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let’s be going; behold the one who betrays me as at hand.”* Judas has arrived. And now we look at the man Judas.

Verse 47, *“While He was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the twelve, came up accompanied by a large crowd with swords and clubs, who came from the chief priests and elders of the people.”* He’s got a massive group of hundreds of people, including the temple police, the Roman soldiers, the leaders of Israel, all the elite religiosity purveyors of that apostate form of Judaism. They’re all there to arrest Him in the night, away from the crowds. And Judas has given them a sign. Verse 48, *“He who was betraying Him gave them a sign saying, ‘Whomever I kiss, He’s the one, seize Him.’”* There’s some profound anger in that. There’s some profound bitterness in that. There’s hatred in that.

Immediately Judas went to Jesus and said, *“Hail, Rabbi,”* and kept on kissing Him - kissed Him repeatedly. And Jesus said to him, *“Friend,”* and it’s not the word for friend that is most used to refer to that; it’s not the kind of friend that you think of as an intimate friend. It’s a word for associate or comrade; it’s a more indifferent word; it’s a more distant word - comrade or associate. *“Do what you have come for.”* And they came and laid hands on Jesus and seized Him.

It’s really unbelievable what Judas has done. Verse 57 says, *“When they had seized Him, they led Him away to Caiaphas, the high priest.”* They were gathered together in this phony trial with false accusations. They tried to bribe witnesses to lie about Him, verse 59, trying to obtain false testimony against Jesus so they could have a reason to put Him to death. They couldn’t get people who could get their story together, though many people tried because they would be paid if they could. Finally some people came along and said He was going to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in

three days, which He said at the beginning of His ministry. And this mock trial went from the high Priest to Herod, to Pilate, and you know all the phases of that trial.

The final adjudication, the high priest, verse 65, tears his robes. He's blasphemed; what further need do we have of witnesses? You have now heard the blasphemy. What do you think? And here's the final verdict on Jesus: He deserves to die. They sentence Him to death; it's the death penalty. *"Then they spat in His face, beat Him with their fists, and others slapped Him and said"...mockingly, of course... "Prophecy to us, You Christ, who is the one who hit You?"* That's the outcome of what Judas did. That's the outcome for Jesus of His betrayal.

But what about Judas? Go down to chapter 27. When morning came and the phony trial went through the night, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus to put Him to death. Bound Him, led Him away and delivered Him to Pilate who was the governor, head of the Roman force who would be the executioners.

And then we read, concerning Judas, in verse 3, *"Then when Judas who had betrayed Him saw that He had been condemned, he felt remorse and returned the thirty-pieces of silver to the Chief Priests and elders, saying, 'I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.' But they said, 'What is that to us? See to that yourself.' And he threw the pieces of silver into the temple sanctuary and departed and he went away and hanged himself. And then the chief priest took the pieces of silver and said, 'It's not lawful to put them into the temple treasury since it's the price of blood.' So they bought a burial place for strangers."*

The horrible tragedy of Judas - hell forever, damned. Jesus said he went to his own place. Judas is the greatest tragedy in human history because of the opportunity that he squandered. Because of unparalleled privilege, he is the ultimate in wasted opportunity. Greedy, a materialist, a money-lover, earthy, full of avarice, greed, motivated by a desire for riches, and self-promotion. These things in him were so strong and so powerful and so overwhelming that they smothered the reality of who he was with for three years. So strong was his sinful heart in its self-love that he ignored the truth, the unmistakable glory of Christ, and went to hell on purpose, he went to hell on purpose. You might say he loved himself too much, he rejected salvation too often, and he resented Christ too strongly.

He had seen the most powerful demonstration of deity ever unleashed in this world - the glory of God displayed in Jesus. And this is where he ended up. What a waste. What an end.

Now I want to go back and I want to look at Peter, the second person, second preacher, second disciple. So let's go back to chapter 26 and pick up the story. In verse 30 they sang a hymn and they went out to the Mount of Olives. And in verse 31, Jesus makes an amazing statement, *"You will all stumble, you will all trip up, you will all fall away because of Me this night. For it is written"...and He quotes Zechariah 13:7... "I will strike down the shepherd and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered."* You're all going to defect. You're all going to fall. You will all be literally offended. You'll all have a kind of tacit denial, tacit betrayal.

Now we don't have the record that the ten in between Peter and Judas actually denied Jesus verbally, publicly, openly; they just ran and hid. But then He says in verse 32, *"After I've been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee,"* which means that their defection was temporary and they would all be brought back together again. Theirs would be a temporary stumbling, a temporary falling, temporary defection. Not like Judas - his was forever.

Well, this gives Peter the opportunity to boast. Verse 33, *"Peter said to Him, 'Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away'"...never. He's adamant, confident. "Jesus said to him, 'Truly I say to you, that this very night before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.'"*

A rooster crows around three A.M. in the morning. You're going to deny Me three times before a rooster crows. "*Peter said to Him, 'Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You.'*" All the disciples said the same thing, too. What a profession.

As it turned out, Peter was over-confident. Jesus had warned him, "*You're going to deny Me, you who said on another occasion, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'*" You're the same one who also said, "*No, no, no, Lord, You're not going to die,*" and at that moment Jesus said, "*Get behind Me, Satan.*" You with all the best theology, you with all the best of intentions, you're going to fail and you're going to fail dramatically. You're going to be ashamed of Me. You're going to deny Me. You're going to betray Me.

And sure enough it happened. Go to verse 69. Jesus is taken to the high priest; trial is going on. Peter's sitting outside in the courtyard. "*A servant girl came to him and said, 'You too were with Jesus the Galilean.' But he denied it before them all saying 'I do not know what you're talking about.'*" When he had gone out to the gateway, he heads for the door to get away from the fire because it lightens his face, and hides into the darkness a little bit. But another servant girl saw him and said to those who were there, "*'This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.' And again he denied it,*" this time "with an oath, "*'I don't know the man.'*" He's lying, and he's taking an oath that he's telling the truth when he knows he's lying. "*A little later the bystanders came up and said to Peter, 'Surely you too are one of them; for even the way you talk gives you away.'*" You have a Galilean accent; we hear it.

This is amazing. "*Then he began to curse and swear, 'I do not know the man!'*" And immediately a rooster crowed. The trial went through the night at the time when the rooster would crow, early before dawn. The signal was given on schedule, right after Peter on three occasions, in three locations, to different people had betrayed Jesus.

Judas couldn't deal with the guilt of his betrayal. He felt remorse. He felt guilt. He felt sadness--sorrow that was so overwhelming that he killed himself. That's serious. When you commit suicide under the weight of guilt, you feel the guilt profoundly.

What about Peter, did he kill himself? Done the same thing; hadn't done it for money, but he had done it. In a sense, he was saying, "This isn't the Christ, this...." He was giving them the same attitude that Judas gave them when he was willing to sell Jesus. But verse 75 says, "*Peter remembered the words which Jesus had said, 'Before a cock crows, you will deny Me three times.'* And he went out and wept bitterly." He didn't kill himself. He just went out and wept.

Something happened in that moment you need to know about. In the middle of Peter's denial, as his denial was coming to its end, *Luke 22:61* says this - now they're in the courtyard of the high priest; Peter is milling around there in the shadows; Jesus is there being tried. Peter's kept his distance. But it says in *Luke 22:61*, "*And the Lord turned and looked at Peter*" - eyeball to eyeball. When Judas' and Jesus' eyes met in the darkness of Gethsemane, Judas kissed Him with a kiss of hate, the kiss of a hypocrite. When the eyes of Peter met the eyes of Jesus, he was crushed, he was shattered, he was devastated and broke down in genuine tears of true repentance. Crushing sadness led Judas to suicide without repentance. Crushing sadness led Peter to restoration with repentance. And the difference was the way they looked at Christ, the way they responded to Christ. For Peter, the vision of Christ drew him to repentance. For Judas, the vision of Christ drew him to suicide. You might say, "For Peter the vision of Christ drew him to heaven; for Judas, the vision of Christ drew him to hell." What was the difference? Peter loved Jesus Christ. He loved Him.

After the resurrection in Galilee, according to *John 21*, Jesus found Peter, found him fishing, which he shouldn't have been doing, but he was. And he had breakfast with him by the shore of the lake.

And He said this to Peter: "*Peter, do you*"...What?... "*do you love Me?*" That's always the question, folks. That's the question. Don't get too complicated about what it means to be a Christian. It means you love Christ, that's what it means.

"*Peter, do you love Me?*" "Yes, Lord." "*Feed My sheep.*"

"*Oh, Peter, do you love Me?*" "Yes, Lord." "*Feed My lambs.*"

A few moments later: "*Peter, do you really love Me?*" And "*Peter was grieved because He said the third time, 'Do you love Me?'*" And what was Peter's response? "*Lord, You know my heart, you know I love You.*" There is so much simplicity in that.

What does it mean to be a Christian? What is the difference between Judas and Peter? Love for Christ, love for Christ - that's the difference; that's the message of Christianity. Feed My sheep; feed My lambs; feed My sheep. You're Mine; do My work based on the fact that you love Me.

How you feel about Christ, how you view Him will determine your heaven or your hell. Peter was a betrayer. And we could see how it happened. He boasted too much. He prayed too little. He acted too fast-drew out a sword and wanted to make a war. He followed too far; he stayed off in the shadows. So you can say, "Yeah, there were some factors in overconfidence and lack of prayer and impulsiveness and cowardice. But Peter was no final disaster." He was no final disaster. Grace was operating in Peter's life. Grace was not operating in Judas' life. Grace was operating in Peter's life because Peter loved Jesus Christ. And John tells us in *1 John 4*, "*We love Him because He first loved us.*" Jesus had set His love on Peter and Peter loved Him in return. They had a relationship of love. That is the deep and compelling attitude of the true believer. It comes down to this: the true believer's love for Christ is the evidence of salvation. In fact, in *1 Corinthians 16:22* Paul says "*If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be damned.*" It comes to that.

You look at Christianity, you look at the church, and you can get very complicated about what it means to be a Christian. It's this simple. Look at your heart. Do you love Christ? Do you seek His honor? Seek His glory? Does your heart go out in affection toward Him? Do you desire to please Him, exalt Him, love Him, worship Him, commune with Him, hear Him? I'll sum it up: "*If you love Me,*" *John 14*, "*you keep My*"...What?... "*commandments*"--you love His Word. You love Him. That's how love acts.

That was Peter. Back in *John 6*, many of the disciples who didn't love Jesus, but hung around left. *John 6* says, "*Many of His disciples walked no more with Him.*" And then Jesus said, "*Do you also want to go away?*" - *Do you also want to leave?* And Peter says, "*To whom will we go? You [and You alone] have the words of life.*" We don't want to go. We want to stay because You give us the words of life. He loved His Lord and He loved the truth that His Lord conveyed. Love desires to know the truth and obey the truth.

Peter was secure because he had a love relationship with Christ. You remember back in *Luke 22, verse 31*, Jesus said to Peter, "*Peter, Satan desires to have you that he might sift you like wheat.*" Satan desires to have you. He's come and asked permission to go after you. He's going to sift you like wheat. "*But when you are converted, strengthen the brethren.*"

What was the guarantee that he would be converted, that he would survive that? Jesus said this one line, "*I have prayed for you that your faith fail not.*" He secures His own by His own intercessory prayer. The Lord loved Peter; Peter loved the Lord. The Lord kept Peter even in the midst of a terrible betrayal. Peter was restored, re-commissioned and became the great gospel preacher in the first era of the church.

From the beginning of *Acts*, *Acts chapter 2*, where he preaches on Pentecost, he's the dominating preacher for the first twelve chapters of *Acts*, the history of the church.

Now let me say something that is very important at this point. Sin and guilt do not produce true repentance. Sin and guilt do not produce true repentance. They may produce remorse; they may produce regret. They may produce sorrow and sadness, and it can even be so severe that it's deadly - people kill themselves because they can't bear the consequences of their evil. But sin and guilt do not produce true repentance. The horror of Judas' sin didn't make him repent. Listen! And the horror of Peter's sin didn't make him repent. And the ugliness of your sin and the weight of your guilt will not make you repent - it is not enough to make a sinner repent. It is enough to make you sad and full of remorse and make you try to undo it and even make you kill yourself. But it's not enough to bring you to true repentance. What makes the sinning, guilt-ridden soul repent is seeing and loving Christ, seeing and loving Christ. Christ becomes all in all, a source of grace and salvation.

Peter loved the Lord Jesus Christ. He believed in Him with all his heart. He believed that He was the Son of God. Yes, he went through a terrible trial, horrible failure, epic disaster, but when his eyes met the eyes of Jesus in the deep night of that trial, he was crushed - not into suicide, but he was crushed into repentance because he loved Christ.

This is the mind of the saved soul. It's about loving Christ. Do you love Christ? Peter gives a personal testimony when he writes his epistle. He says this in chapter 1, "*Though you have not seen Him, you love Him. And though you do not see Him now but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.*" Peter had lived that. He had lived through an unbelievable trial, a disastrous failure, and in the midst of that he had seen Christ. And Christ had given him a look of love, restored him, re-commissioned him, used him mightily. Peter says, "*You who haven't seen Him, you also love Him. And because of that, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, knowing you're going to receive the outcome of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.*"

So two men, two students, two preachers indistinguishable to their close friends - one is a suicide, one is a saint; one is in hell, one is in heaven. Both betrayed Jesus in very, very adamant, public ways - both at the same time, in the same kinds of circumstances. Similarities are many but no two men could be further apart, further separated than these two-Judas for whom Jesus was a disappointment, whom He resented, if not hated; Peter for whom Jesus was a Savior, whom he loved. Judas was a devil who went to his own place, the place he deserved. Peter was a saint who went to the place prepared for him, the place he did not deserve. Because in the end, Judas belonged to Satan and Peter belonged to Jesus.

It's all about loving Christ. And that's how you know your spiritual condition. A benediction, *Ephesians 6:24*, "*Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptible love.*" Let me read that again, "*Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptible love.*"

Do you love Him? Do you love Him so that you long to honor Him, to please Him, to exalt Him, to lift up His name, to obey His Word, to proclaim Him? That's the mark of a true believer.

Father, we ask that You would be merciful and gracious to us as You always are to sinners who repent. Who would ask if there are any here who are in the category of Judas who have been experiencing maybe for a long time, maybe for years, the same experiences with all the rest. But they're going to end up separated from You and from all who belong to You forever in eternal punishment because there's no love for Christ. Give them a vision of Christ. Why do we preach Christ constantly, relentlessly, year after year after year? Why? Because it's the vision of Christ that saves; it's the lifting up of Christ that draws

men. May Christ become all glorious, all wondrous, desirable, beautiful, magnificent, the desire of every heart. And for those of us who do love Him, and who stumble and fail, thank You for the grace that is continually extended to us. We confess that we don't love Him as we should, but we long to love Him more. We would desire to love with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. Falling short of that, we ask for grace and forgiveness for our failures, failure to love. If we could love perfectly in that, there would be the keeping of the whole law. Would You by Your power, by the working of the Holy Spirit in us, and by exposure to the truth in Holy Scripture, increase our love for Christ. May He be all and all to us.

Father, we ask that You would work your work in our hearts to proclaim the truth as only the beginning. You have to do the work of making the truth bear fruit in hearts and we pray, Lord, that You would do that this day. We thank You for the blessed time of praise and exaltation and worship which lifted our souls, and we also thank You for the time of self-examination because we've been instructed to examine ourselves whether we be in the faith. And may that honest examination go on and for those who know You, for the Peters in this congregation, may there be joy unspeakable, inexpressible and full of glory as we celebrate your grace toward us in Christ. Increase our love for Him, we pray in His wonderful name. Amen.

John MacArthur – GTY.org

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