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Betrayal

DENOMINATIONAL BROADCAST  
OF THE REFORMED CHURCHES  
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## BETRAYAL

(Judas the traitor was standing there with them.)  
John 18:5

Edith Curtis and Joann Mader-you probably don't know these women, but you know women just like them. They were both betrayed by their husbands. Today they are having a hard time. It used to be different.

Edith was the wife of a college professor. She helped him make it in the university; she entertained and played the role that was expected of her. Her husband did very well and was promoted. She was demoted. Her husband told her the marriage was over. It's tough being fifty-five years old, with an obsolete college degree, looking for work. The professor, by the way, now has a twenty-five year-old, new model, wife.

Joann heard about the end of her marriage by means of a telephone call from her husband; he phoned from a distant city where he had gone on a business trip. Their marriage had lasted nineteen years, and there were five children, aged two weeks to fifteen years. She was devastated when the call came. Her husband told her he had nothing against her personally; he

just wanted a wife who was more career oriented. Today Joann does her best to make ends meet.

These cases were described some time ago in the *Wall Street Journal*. They mention them as common examples of betrayal. Betrayal, I'm sorry to say, is a regular component of human experience. There is it more bitter and ugly than when it occurs in connection with marriage and the family. Edith and Joann are typical of millions of women. The other happens, too, all the time: women are unfaithful to their husbands and betray them.

Within the family, too, betrayal can cause enormous bitterness. A father told me of his only son, who had systematically connived and cheated until his father had lost thousands of dollars. And as the father neared the end of his life, his mind and body weakening with advancing years, the son was hovering in the background, working with lawyers, greedy and grasping, trying to get what he could out of his father before his father died and trying to make sure he would get what ever was left after his father was gone.

Now, I dare say that you know some thing about betrayal firsthand. Most of do, especially now, when even children are sometimes abused by their very

Betrayal is everywhere: children are betrayed by parents, parents by children, husbands by wives, wives by husbands, business partners by business partners. It's within the home, it's within business, it's within schools, churches, hospitals, and government. People who should care for other people exploit them instead. Institutions that should be caring for us destroy us instead.

Those of us who have felt betrayal's devastating impact have to go on and try to make the best of it. And that is hard to do. If we are not careful, the hatred that festers inside us can destroy us. We have to rise above our hatred. If possible, we even have to forgive, and that is practically impossible sometimes.

Being betrayed has a crushing effect on your feeling of self-worth. When someone who has been close to you and who has loved and admired you turns on you and doesn't care about you anymore, you cannot help but question whether you are really worth anything. This is why, when we are betrayed, we are in serious danger, emotionally and psychologically. It's possible for betrayed people to do foolish and damaging things.

What should we do when we are betrayed ... disgraced ... humiliated?

Here is one very good answer: We should go to Jesus. Now, you may be saying, "What good is that going to do? Can I go to Jesus anyway?" I can understand why you respond that way. I recognize, for example, that Edith and Joann, whose husbands betrayed them, possibly should go to a lawyer or to a welfare agency or to school to learn some marketable skills. But they should also go to Jesus. When I say this, I am not just making some religiously pious sounds designed to turn attention away from the basic issues. It is because when we go to Jesus, we have contact with someone who knows everything there is to know about betrayal.

Jesus is an expert on betrayal because He was betrayed. Remember, remember Judas? If you look with me at Judas' betrayal of Jesus, perhaps you will be able to handle what has happened to you.

Betrayal is a prominent subject in the Bible. The opening chapters (Genesis 1-3) contain the record of man's betrayal of God. Often we call the event "man's fall into sin." But "man's betrayal of God" is also a good name for it, for every element of betrayal was present when Adam and Eve, who had been created perfect and who had enjoyed perfect fellowship with God Himself, voluntarily chose to join

Satan in Satan's fight against God.

Since this first betrayal, all human beings have had something perverse in their nature-something that has made them very apt to betray other people. We like to think that we are loving and kind and loyal and committed, but that's just not true. We are in fact betrayers.

Our loves, our loyalties, our commitments are often no stronger than our selfishness. When we analyze ourselves, we discover that selfishness and self-interest are often uppermost in our minds. Every thing else is secondary. This has been the case since the beginning of human history, when a man and a woman exchanged their loyalty and love for God for something that Satan offered.

David, the great king of Israel, was also betrayed. He was betrayed by his son Absalom; his closest advisor, Ahithophel; his general, Joab; and the high priest, Abiathar. Because of these disgraceful betrayals, David had to flee his throne in Jerusalem, endure ridicule and hardship, and experience deep grief. He expressed his feelings in two psalms:

If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it; if a foe were raising himself against me, I could hide from him. But it is you, a man like myself,

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my companion, my close friend, with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship as we walked with the throng at the house of (5d124).

Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me (419).

Many of us can understand at once where David was coming from. There is no anguish more bitter than that of one who has been betrayed-whether by a friend, a family member, or a trusted colleague. This is exactly how a woman feels when her husband suddenly finds someone else to love. This is how we feel when someone who has been close, loving, understanding, supportive, suddenly loses all interest in our well-being. We feel as David felt: "I could take it if it were my enemy who were acting this way, but this is my close friend who is insulting me and ruining me!"

Now, then, we who are often betrayed and often feel despondent because of these betrayals-we should be able to understand a little bit of what Jesus went through when He was betrayed by Judas. Judas-his very name means betrayer; over the years Judas has been so inti-

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mately associated with the idea of betrayal that now his name is inseparably linked to what he did. Each of the accounts of Jesus' death tells about Judas. John 18 declares parenthetically that when Jesus' captors came to get Jesus just before His trial and crucifixion, Judas was standing with them. Here's John's entire report of Jesus' arrest:

When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was an olive grove, and he and his disciples went into it.

Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples. So Judas came to the grove, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons.

Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, "Who is it you want?"

"Jesus of Nazareth," they replied.

"I am he," Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) When Jesus said, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground (vv. 1-6).

It's difficult, sometimes, when reading the Bible, to feel the full force of the events it records. This is true with the event described here. The betrayal of Jesus is part of the most impressive drama that has been played out on the earth. Human history, which began in the Garden of Eden, now came to the Garden of Gethsemane. This was not an ordinary apprehension of a fugitive by a band of armed men. Within hours Jesus would be crucified, and salvation would become a possibility for all who believe in Him.

In the garden all the powers of darkness, of Satan, and of death converged on Jesus Christ, the prince of life. Yet at that moment when Jesus met His captors, another type of suffering hit Him as well—among those who had come to destroy Him was the traitor.

Just as David, the king of Israel, bemoaned the fact that he had been betrayed by someone who had sat at his table and eaten bread with him, so Jesus looked upon the face of His erstwhile disciple and remembered that only hours earlier He had celebrated the Passover with him in the upper room. As one of Jesus' followers, Judas had shared in every adventure of the last months: he had seen devils flee, blind people see, and crippled

people walk. He had heard the Master speak with stunning authority. Nothing of Jesus' splendid, compassionate, loving ministry had been lost on this man. He had walked with the disciples of the Lord but now he stood among those who had come to kill the Savior.

John, describing what happened in the olive grove, says, "Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples." John recalled many times when the disciple band had been with Jesus in the quiet of the gentle slopes where gnarled olive trees stood as silent witnesses to Jesus' gentle conversations with His disciples. We know that Jesus often went to the olive grove to pray. This was a sacred, hallowed spot, forever imprinted in the disciples' memory as the place of close communion with the Savior. And when they had been there, Judas had been with them. Now he was in the olive grove once more, but the circumstances were different in every way.

Jesus, of course, had known all this was coming; He had known that standing among His captors would be Judas. But now what He had known in His mind became a reality before His eyes. There Judas stood. He knew so much; he had

been taught so much; he had participated in so much. He had spoken and the demons had fled, just as they had before the other disciples. To be sure, Judas had his faults—he was a thief, the Bible says. But then, each of the disciples had his faults. Now, though, there was no longer any doubt. There Judas stood, among the enemies of the Lord.

We all know of Judas' kiss. At some point he disengaged himself from the group, came forward, and kissed the Savior. Judas betrayed Jesus, but he also betrayed tenderness and affection as he used the sign of love to bring hatred's most fearsome goals to pass. In his brief kiss we see the epitome of all the awkward moments when people who are betrayed and who betray one another still make a show of decency as they live together. In Judas' kiss we see a reflection of all those awkward moments when those who have betrayed one another still shake hands or even embrace—and make small talk, as if nothing serious has occurred.

In Judas' betrayal we see a most grotesque and powerful element in Jesus' suffering. Surely, when we think of His suffering, we remember the crucifixion itself. But He also suffered emotionally. We must never forget that Jesus was a human

being when He suffered. He ~~like~~ like us. His feelings were like our ~~feels~~ feelings, yet more intense. He knew His disciples intimately. Often He had looked ~~and~~ and the disciple circle and had seen ~~the~~ their hearts, their souls. He had been dismayed by what they thought and dreamed of. They were proud, ambitious, and selfish. Yet He loved them. They were His men, specially chosen to represent Him. Now one of them stood among the temple guards and Roman soldiers ready to pounce on Him. Judas had left Him and stood among His enemies.

What does all this mean for us?

First, that we can go to Jesus in prayer when we are betrayed. He knows exactly what we are going through. ~~Before~~ Before Him, we can cry and bemoan our misery.

But there is more. We can ask Jesus to send His Spirit into our broken ~~hearts~~ hearts. His Spirit will comfort us, perhaps by giving us a peace that passes all understanding or by sending a Christian to us with a healing word.

Jesus can also bring the grace of forgiveness into our broken lives. We are betrayed, yes, but we are also ~~betrayers~~ betrayers. Sometimes the experience of being betrayed causes us to remember other times, other places, when we were the betrayers.

The good news of the Bible is not only for broken hearts but also for guilty hearts. Jesus shed His blood to pay for our betrayals, too.

Judas never lived to receive Christ's forgiveness, but others who were ~~part~~ part of Jesus' crucifixion did. After Jesus died and rose again, the power of the good news of forgiveness through Jesus' cross ~~got~~ got over the country, and some who had cried out the loudest for His death became His forgiven followers. Jesus died to bring hope to those who have been hurt by betrayal and forgiveness to those ~~who~~ who have brought pain to others through their betrayals. He is a perfect Savior, one who knows us perfectly and one who did everything necessary to heal us.

Has someone disgraced you? Has someone humiliated you? Has someone betrayed you? Go to Jesus and ask Him to comfort you. He understands. Have you betrayed someone yourself? Confess your sin and ask Jesus to forgive you. He will, and He will help to make your life beautiful.

## PRAYER

*As we think about Judas, Lord Jesus, we are disturbed by the thought that we, too, have a traitorous streak in us. Forgive us our betrayals and treacheries. Cleanse us and make us loyal to one another. Most of all, make us loyal to you, our Savior.*

*Some of us have recently been betrayed. We need healing and comfort desperately. Give us the faith to come to you, Lord Jesus, who endured Judas' treachery. Come close to us in our needs. Amen.*

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