

The Betrayal and Denial of Christ

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March 6-7, 2004

John: The Passion of Christ

John 18:1-14

Some of you may be familiar with the name Robert Hanssen. Robert Hanssen was an FBI agent for several decades. He had a large Roman Catholic family of six kids. The Hanssens were conservative Catholics. They were part of a small faction within the Catholic Church called Opus Dei.

The Hanssens were also conservative politically. They marched in pro-life rallies. They had anti-abortion stickers on their van. They were supporters of the NRA. Robert Hanssen was a gun collector. He had 14 guns in his house, including an Uzi semi-automatic. He even had a James Bond pistol.

But along with Robert Hansen's religious and political conservatism and his respectable family, there was something else going on in Hansen's life. He was a traitor. He was a traitor to his wife and family, and also a traitor to his country. For several decades he betrayed his wife's trust through numerous affairs and a pornographic addiction. In fact, he disgustingly secretly filmed his wife and then showed the video to a friend. And he, over the course of two decades, betrayed our country.

Robert Hanssen was a counter-intelligence agent. As a result of his assignment in the FBI, he had direct access to extremely sensitive, top-secret programs and

operations in the United States. On at least 20 separate occasions, he turned over documents to the Russian KGB. He also turned over several dozen computer disks, about 6000 pages of valuable information.

When he was caught, everyone was stunned – his wife, his children, his friends, his church, and his coworkers at the FBI.

Betrayal is, perhaps, the single most painful thing that a human being can endure. The Italian poet Dante, in his famous medieval poem called “The Divine Comedy,” describes hell as being like an inverted funnel that goes deep into the earth with nine levels, or circles, going down. He ranks the sins of the misfortunate who will end up in one of these circles according to the gravity of their sin. The further down in hell Dante placed you, the more heinous the sin. Do you know who the lowest level of hell was reserved for according to Dante? In the 9th circle of hell, the lowest level of hell, Dante placed the traitor - Satan, the arch traitor, along with Judas, the betrayer of Christ, Cassius and Brutus, assassins of Julius Caesar and other traitors.

Have you ever experienced betrayal? Have you ever been stabbed in the back?

Almost all children experience the shock of betrayal by friends growing up like the discovery that a trusted confidante told your secrets or gossiped about you or sided against you in a fight. Do you recall being betrayed as a child? Certainly adultery, of which some here have been guilty, and others have been victims, is an act of betrayal.

One of the great acts of betrayal that afflicts so many Americans today is being sexually abused as children. God gives us children to protect them, and to provide a secure environment for them. We learn to trust and depend on our parents until we learn to shift our trust and dependence onto God. In 90% of all sexual abuse of children the abuser is a relative, or a person known to the child. Often the abuser will gain a child's trust by giving gifts and special favors. The abuser will use the growing bond with themselves and the child in order to set the child up.

What occurs in sexual abuse is the betrayal of trust. And the betrayal of trust is not only by the offender, but also often by non-offending parents who know about the abuse, but choose to ignore the evidence. Instead of protecting, comforting, nourishing their children, securing their child's environment, a parent chooses to go along with, or bury their head in the sand, or blame the victim. So this betrayal of trust shreds a child's capacity to trust and depend even upon God, the most loving, safe, and nurturing Father.

Some of you have experienced the pain of betrayal through abuse, through sexual abuse, or through a partner's affair and a cover-up. Some of you have experienced the pain of betrayal in a business partnership. You were ripped off. You've experienced embezzlement. We Christians are certainly not immune from being betrayed. Christian counselors, Christian pastors, small group leaders can betray us. Sometimes people you invest in the most can turn against us and hurt us the most. Indeed, as a pastor, I know that some of the greatest pain of my fellow pastors is the

result of being betrayed, being stabbed in the back, by a close associate, a board member, or colleague.

Of course, some of us have been betrayers of other Christians, of business partners, of spouses, or perhaps even of children.

We are reminded in the gospels that one of the many things that Jesus suffered was the pain of betrayal. In fact, every week when we take communion we are reminded of the occasion of Jesus' suffering and death, when the words of institution are repeated before we drink the cup and eat the bread. What do we hear from the words of the apostle Paul?

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On the night he was betrayed, Jesus took bread...

Over this next month, as we prepare ourselves spiritually for Easter, I'm going to finish up the gospel of John, which I started about a year ago. We're going to focus on The Passion of Christ. We've been hearing a great deal about the Passion of Christ because of Mel Gibson's movie.

The word "passion" comes from the Latin verb "patior," which means, "to suffer." Scholars used the word "passion" to refer to the arrest, the trial, and the crucifixion of Jesus.

I'm going to call today's teaching, "The Betrayal and Denial of Christ." Let's pray.

John 18:1-11

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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. Again he asked them, "Who is it you want?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." "I told you that I am he," Jesus answered. "If you are looking for me, then let these men go." This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: "I have not lost one of those you gave me." Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) Jesus commanded Peter, "Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?"

It was Thursday night. The hour that Jesus had repeatedly prophesied about in the gospel of John has finally arrived. Jesus is about to be arrested and tried before the Jewish High Priests and Pontius Pilate, and then be crucified.

Let's read the first two verses again.

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Jn. 18:1-2 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.

John tells us that the betrayal and arrest of Jesus takes place in a garden. We read in the NIV from v. 1, "On the other side there was an olive grove, and he and his disciples went into it." That is not literally what John writes. Literally, what John writes is "there was a garden." Apparently, the garden was a frequent place of retreat by Jesus with his disciples. Luke, in his gospel, tells us that Jesus slept outside in this garden during the entirety of the Passion Week.

Wealthy people in the city often had gardens outside of the city walls. These would often be walled enclosures. So the owner of this particular garden apparently let Jesus and his disciples camp out there at night. Now, John doesn't name the garden, but the other gospel writers call it Gethsemane, which means "olive press." Apparently, there were some olive groves there and that's why the NIV translates it into an "olive grove."

But what we find in the first 2 verses is Jesus and his disciples descend down into the steep valley east of the city of Jerusalem, a valley called Kidron. They cross this little dried up river and go into this garden. We read in v. 3,

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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.

A detachment of soldiers came to arrest Jesus. This was a Roman detachment accompanying some Jewish police officers sent by the Jewish High Priests. I will speak next week about the various roles of the Romans and the Jewish leaders in the trial and death of Jesus. In recent months this has become, again, a very significant issue because of the historic anti-Semitism of the church towards Jewish people and a very vicious charge that Jews have had to live with for nearly 2000 years – the charge of being “God-killers.” I will speak about that next week.

But there was apparently a very significant concern that during the explosive atmosphere surrounding the Jewish Passover, with tens of thousands of Jewish pilgrims filling Jerusalem, anti-government riots could break out. Passover was always a time for revolutionary activity. With Jesus having been hailed as the Jewish Messiah, the King, the true Ruler of Israel, just four days before on Sunday, what we call “Palm Sunday,” the Romans and the Jewish leaders were taking no chances.

They were concerned that with eleven men around him, and perhaps with Galilean pilgrims beside his side, that a riot might break out. So, a heavily armed detachment of Roman soldiers and a contingent of Jewish lawmen go out and arrest Jesus; they arrest him in a garden.

N.T. Wright, who is a very prominent New Testament scholar, points out that the most pivotal moments in history take place in a garden. Those of you who know your Bible remember that it was in the Garden of Eden that sin entered the world through our first parents, Adam and Eve. If we want to trace down the root of what is wrong with the world – why cancer, why wars, why famines, why so much crime, murders and robberies – we have to go back to the first garden and the entrance of sin into the world through our first parents, Adam and Eve.

Then in John 18 we read about a second garden, the Garden of Gethsemane. This is where the arrest and betrayal of Jesus took place. This began a 15-hour period, which resulted in Jesus' trial, his beating, and his death. The second garden involving the betrayal and arrest of Messiah became inevitable as a result of the sin that entered the world in the first garden. In fact, the second garden became absolutely necessary in light of what happened in the first garden.

John then records a third garden that Mary Magdalene and the other disciples visited. It was the garden containing the empty tomb of Christ. And it was in this third garden, the Garden of the Resurrection, that God undid the effects of the first and second gardens and began the process of healing the world and restoring Eden.

There are three gardens, three pivotal events in history. Each garden is a response to the events that took place in the garden preceding it. Each garden contains a question about seeking and searching. We read in v. 4,

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

Who are you looking for? Now, this is an echo of the question asked in the first garden. It is a prophecy of the question asked in the third garden. Do you remember back in the first garden, the Garden of Eden, God was looking for Adam and Eve, who were hiding in the bushes in their shame. Back in the first garden, we read these words:

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Gen. 3:9, “But the Lord God called to the man, ‘Where are you?’”

Do you know, God still asks the same question of every man and woman, every teenager and every child: Where are you? Where are you at? The Holy Spirit is constantly asking that question. Where are you spiritually today? Honest to God, where are you? Are you hiding from God in shame because of some sin? Are you hiding from God in bitterness because you feel like God has ripped you off because one of your prayers has gone unanswered? Where are you? Have you kept yourself

so distracted with television or some other diversion that you just don't have to think about God? Where are you? God asks the same question today of you that he asked of our first parents in the Garden of Eden.

Are you far from God because you just haven't spent much time in investing in your relationship with him? Are you far from him because you've been putting something in your life ahead of God? Where are you spiritually today, really?

In the second garden, Jesus asked the question. We read in v. 4,

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"Who is it you want?"

Or more literally, "Who are you seeking?" God was the seeker in the first garden, but now he is the sought. The Roman soldiers and the Jewish police, led by Judas, are the seekers. Jesus asks: Who are you seeking? But God is not sought out by Judas and the soldiers for the purpose of faith, or the purpose of finding truth, or for worship. God is sought out for the purpose of betrayal, arrest, accusation, and crucifixion.

Do you know that people seek God for the same reasons today, as Judas and the guards sought God back in that second garden? People seek God to accuse God, and to attack him – not to find the truth, "Let's try to find a discrepancy in the gospel accounts." Look at the discrepancy here between Mark's account of the arrest of

Jesus, and the apostle John's account. Mark doesn't record that the Roman soldiers fell to the ground. He doesn't record the name of the servant, whose ear was cut off. John doesn't mention the name of the garden. He doesn't mention Jesus' prayer for the healing of the servant's ear. There are obvious contradictions here.

You know, I've had in the last 30 years dozens and dozens of conversations with men and women about the historic reliability of the Bible. There are a number of reliable books out on the reliability of the scripture. There is a classic book by F.F. Bruce, "The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?" There is a very good book by Paul Barnett, "Is the New Testament Reliable?" There is a best-selling book by Lee Stroebel called "The Case for Christ," which deals with issues of historic reliability. In other words, if you are honestly asking the question: why should I trust the Bible, why should I trust Christ, there are some very good books that will feed your mind.

But you know, I have in the course of the last 30 years met many, many people, who search out the scriptures and search out Christ, with the same kind of animas that drove the Roman and Jewish guards. These folks were not truth seekers, honest inquirers trying to go where the evidence leads us. Instead, the guards then, and the attackers of scripture today, have a private agenda, which drives their conclusions about Christ.

The agenda may be a political agenda. I simply don't like what the scripture says about an issue I am passionate about. Therefore, I conclude that the scripture has

problems. The Romans and the Jewish leaders had political problems with Jesus that drove their conclusions about him.

Sometimes our agenda could be as base as a student I talked with at OSU a few years ago who confessed to me, “If I allowed myself to believe what you are saying, I would have to stop sleeping with my girlfriend. I don’t want to stop sleeping with my girlfriend.” Over the last 30 years I have repeatedly discovered that at the bottom of a lot of seemingly sincere, intellectual questions about Jesus, there was a moral problem.

Let me go further. I have not yet found a truly moral man or woman, a man or woman who didn’t have a private agenda, and who truly dug in and examined the evidence that didn’t find in favor of Christ and the scriptures. Many folks are seeking God, but for the purpose of attack, for the purpose of rejection, for the purpose of judging him false, and his Word false.

Well, there was a question as well at the third garden. Jesus asks the question at the third garden, the Garden of Resurrection. This one was directed to Mary Magdalene. The same words as in the Garden of Gethsemane, John 20:15,

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“Woman,” he said, “Why are you crying? Who is it you’re looking for?”

This time the question was directed to a sincere seeker. She was looking for Jesus. She was looking for Jesus because she loved Jesus, because she loved the truth. Because she knew Jesus was the answer to all of her life's problems.

Let me ask you the question that Jesus asked to the armed guards and to Mary Magdalene. Who are you looking for? What is it you are seeking? Are you seeking an argument against Christianity, an argument against giving up control to Christ? You'll discover that, if that's what you are seeking.

On the other hand, are you really looking for relationship with God? Are you looking for personal change? Are you looking for transformation that can only come from God? Are you looking to deepen your faith or answer some of your nagging doubts? If you come as an honest God seeker, as someone trying not to attack God when you find him, but to surrender to God when he draws near to you, the promise of scripture is Jeremiah 29:13.

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You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the Lord.

Now, how can we account for Judas? How can we account for his betrayal leading the troops to Jesus?

Judas didn't start off intending to betray Jesus. He wasn't a plant. He wasn't a Russian mole, a double agent. Judas started off the way lots of traitors start off. He started off in love with Jesus. Most adulterers don't start their marriages planning to commit adultery. They start off in love. They plan to be faithful. They really mean their vows. I think Judas sincerely saw in Jesus the fulfillment of his hopes and dreams. And Judas was selected by Jesus not because he was a betrayer, but after a night of prayer. Judas didn't walk around with a dark mask on, covering his eyes, or a shadow over his face. Everyone would have said that Judas was indistinguishable from the rest of the disciples.

He was knowledgeable. He was zealous. He wasn't given to impulsiveness like Peter, or doubt like Thomas. He had obvious administrative and financial abilities, so he was appointed the treasurer of the corporation of Jesus and the disciples. He was the accountant. He was the bookkeeper of their little enterprise. Who expects the accountant to be the betrayer?

How do we account for Judas?

Novelists for centuries, and Hollywood for decades, have tried to supply some reasonable explanation for the betrayal of Judas. Some people have said that Judas wanted to force Jesus' hand by pushing him into a confrontation with his enemies. He wanted to force Jesus to violently overthrow the Romans.

Some portray Judas as disillusioned, that Judas realized that he wasn't going to raise an army against Rome and he had grown upset at Jesus' softness. He felt betrayed by Jesus, like militants in Palestine who are upset with the approach of Palestinian moderates. He felt betrayed.

The Bible doesn't really support the various speculative theories about why Judas betrayed Jesus. It simply tells us two things: 1) Judas was a greedy man; and, 2) He seared his conscience.

Judas was a greedy man. We read in Jn. 12:3-6.

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Then Mary took a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume. She poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair and the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." He did not say this because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; as keeper of the moneybag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

Is greed a possible motive for betraying Christ? Jesus tells us to be on our guard against greed in Luke 12. Jesus reminds us that our lives do not consist in the abundance of our possessions. Jesus says to us that you cannot serve God and

money, to which we Americans respond, “Oh yes you can.” Or with an even higher degree of self-deception, “We’re not greedy.”

You know, I love America, but I honestly believe that we live in a society that is dominated by the sin of greed. We can’t build shopping malls fast enough to keep up with our insatiable appetites. How many square feet of shopping does Central Ohio really need? Why do we need shopping malls with 2 million square feet of shopping? What is it about us that requires a Saks right next to a Lazarus, right next to a Kaufman’s, next door to a Lord and Taylor’s? Why is it that recreation for so many of us is acquiring more stuff? What do you want to do today? I don’t know, why don’t we go shopping?

Are you and I greedy? Do we live in a greedy society? Can anyone here with an income honestly say that you do not buy more than you need? If so, you are a very unique person. Because the truth is, we don’t need most of what we even buy. We don’t even need (I’m not just talking about survival) most of what we buy for our own pleasure, or our entertainment. We don’t need a lot of what we buy for our work, for our play, or for our enjoyment. And yet, we buy more. We buy more clothes than we need. We buy more furniture than we need. We buy more kitchen equipment than we need. We buy more cookbooks than we need. We buy more shoes than we need. We buy more tools than we need. We buy more musical equipment than we need.

We have a society whose economy is entirely dependent upon stirring up our greed, inciting you and me to always want more. So we wander around antique stores and

mall. We look through catalogs. We look at websites. We're always asking ourselves the question: Is there anything here that I want? We live in a society in which CEO's, like the head of the Disney Corporation, made \$700 million dollars in the last several years, not for the purpose of creating more jobs, or opening up hospitals, but just to accumulate money.

Could a person be betrayed for money? Greed is behind a lot of traitorous acts. Benedict Arnold, the most famous traitor in American history, attempted to sell out the cause of the American Revolution to the British simply for money because he had an extravagant lifestyle that he wanted to sustain.

Robert Hanssen, who I mentioned at the beginning of the message, was motivated largely by greed and the desire to maintain his particular sexual perversions. Greed is behind huge family fights over estates. Brothers and sisters betray each other for money.

Greed is behind the betrayal of a lot of Christian faith. Why is the so-called prosperity teaching so popular in the Christian church. Teaching that tells you how to get more money. Give a certain amount of money, give a month's wage, give 2-weeks wages, and God is going to give you back even more money. Why is the prosperity teaching so popular? Because it finds a willing home in our greedy hearts.

Several years ago a pastor wrote me a solicitation letter. I didn't know this pastor. We'd never met. But he solicited me to give him personally \$40 for each year that he

was alive as he was celebrating his 40th birthday. He said that if I gave him \$1600 – *as a personal gift* – he would sow his ministry into my life. We get so used to this kind of perversion of the Christian faith that we laugh it off.

But something is happening inside of us as a result of greed. We are willing to go to war because of greed. We're willing to have children work in factories to produce our clothes cheaply because of greed. We're willing to shut our eyes to suffering because of greed.

Friend, do you see yourself afflicted with the disease of greed? I do. I see it in my purchases. I see it in my credit card statements. I see it in my overstuffed house. God, save us from the greed that handed Jesus over to death.

And we have a progressive searing of Judas' conscience. When sin is not confessed and dealt with, it almost always inevitably lead to another sin. You see it in children. A child steals another child's ball. And when the ball is discovered hidden among the child's things, he says, "I just wanted to play with it." He lies. He says, "I really wasn't stealing it. I'm telling you the truth."

A high school girl watches TV when she should be studying. Her parents call her to account. She snaps at them and tells them that she's prepared and to leave her alone. The next day she is totally unprepared for the exam and so she cheats. Then she feels bad, her conscience feels bad, and so she goes out with her friends and gets high. Then she drives her mom's car too fast and gets a speeding ticket.

When sin is unconfessed, it almost always causes another sin.

See, sin is a progressive phenomenon. Our consciences become more and more dull, the more you and I traffic in sin. And pretty soon, we become insensitive to the voice of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God is still speaking, but our consciences have become calloused. And that's what happened to Judas. He got used to saying "no" to Christ. Step by step he kept rejecting Christ and Christ's will.

In Jn. 13 at the Last Supper, we read about Jesus telling the other disciples that one of them is going to betray him. When they ask him who it is, Jesus said,

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Jn. 13:26-27 – Jesus answered, "It is the one who to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." Then dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon. As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered him.

Jesus is offering Judas a way out. He is offering him friendship, acceptance. But Judas finally flips the switch and rejects Jesus completely and darkness enters his soul. Before that, Satan is on the outside tempting, inciting, prodding, and pushing. But now Satan is on the inside. Through the progressive practice of sin, we do not know what that point is when darkness moves from the outside to the inside and our hearts really become darkened.

It happens. Our choices are huge. Every choice we make shapes us. When you resist temptation, when you say “no” even though you’ve said “yes” a hundred times before, when you say “no” this time, you become a better person. When you indulge temptation, because you say, “Well, I’ve indulged it before, I may as well indulge it again.” Satan lies to us and says, “Well, you’ve gone this far, might as well go all the way. You’ve already blown it, so sin to the max!” Have you ever heard that lie? I don’t know where the point is where Satan enters, but I find John 13:27 a really scary verse.

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As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered him.

That should fill each one of us with fear that Satan really could enter your heart.

And then there is Peter, who denied the Lord. We often look at Peter as being different in kind than Judas. We see Peter being more weak than wicked. We classify Peter as being over here, rather than being over there with Judas. But you know, I believe there is only a dotted line that separates weakness with wickedness. It is not a solid line. I believe that weakness indulged in long enough can very definitely become wickedness. Peter was in mortal danger of crossing the line and becoming a Judas. A co-dependent wife can become a conspirator in her husband’s sins – protecting him, lying for him, or assisting him. Weakness indulged in long

enough can become wickedness. In fact, I believe that all of us, if we let our flesh go, we can become a Judas.

We are told that Peter denied the Lord three times. I'll just read one of those denials. John 18:15-18. Peter denies the Lord two other times in John 18:25-26.

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Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus. Because this disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard, but Peter had to wait outside at the door. The other disciple, who was known to the high priest, came back spoke to the girl on duty there and brought Peter in. "Surely you are not another of this man's disciples?" the girl at the door asked Peter. He replied, "I am not." It was cold, and the servants and officials stood around a fire they had made to keep warm. Peter also was standing with them, warming himself.

How did Peter, who recognized Jesus to be the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of the Living God. How did Peter, who left everything to follow Christ, who was a disciple, who saw the miracles, how did Peter get to the place of denying the Lord three times?

We could attribute it to laziness in prayer. Certainly, when we just keep ourselves from God, we keep ourselves from praying as Peter did in the garden. He was opened up to temptation. But I just want to point to two things: 1) Peter was self-

indulgent. He consistently chose the easy way over the right way. In Mark 8, Jesus tells the disciples that he is going to be rejected and killed. Here's what we read:

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Mk. 8:32-33 – He spoke plainly about this and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. When Jesus turned around and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter, “Get behind me, Satan,” he said, “You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.”

Certainly Peter was offended at the thought of Christ suffering. But I think there is a deeper thought in Peter concerning suffering altogether.

Scott Peck, the psychiatrist, writes of a confrontation that he had with one of his patients, who had made pact with the devil. The patient told Satan that if he ever did a particular thing again, Satan could take the life of the patient's son. Scott Peck was horrified. He said, “Why would you make a pact with the devil?” The patient said, “Well, I feel a little guilty about this.” But Scott Peck confronted him and said, “You know, your whole life you always take the easy way out. You always sell out. You like to think of yourself as easy going, Joe-Cool, but I don't know where you're going easy except to hell.” He said, “George, you always choose the easy way, rather than the right way. You always pick the painless way. If something is painful, you avoid it. You quit school because it was hard. You stopped taking music lessons because they were challenging. When your marriage got hard, you left it. You quit jobs because you don't like them or because they were hard.”

Friend, you can tell a person of good character from a person of bad character regarding the way they react to the prospect of pain and suffering. People of good character are willing to incur pain in order to produce what is right. They are willing to say “no” to themselves, even when it is painful. I’ll confront this friend even though it is hard. I’ll call my spouse to account even though life will be unpleasant for a while. I won’t break the law or bend the rules or lie even though I will end up worse off for it.

And people of bad character are constantly looking for the path of least resistance. How can I get this the simplest way, the easiest way, the least suffering way? I’ll cut corners. I’ll avoid the hard guy. I’ll lay off responsibility on others. I won’t confess when caught. I’ll barely get over. Know anybody who always chooses the easy way over the right way?

Peter was also self-deceived. We read in Matt.26:33-35,

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Peter replied, “Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.” “I tell you the truth,” Jesus answered, “Before the rooster crows you will disown me three times.” But Peter declared, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” And the other disciples said the same.

When are we in greatest spiritual danger? When we choose the easy way around something, rather than the right way through it, and when we are over-confident. When we say, “Well, the normal rules may apply to everyone else, but they don’t apply to me. I’m safe.”

“Sure, I know that normally you shouldn’t date outside the faith. I know I’ve been warned that I might fall in love. But I’m not that stupid.”

“I’m not so stupid to think that just because I date a non-Christian I am going to end up actually having sex, or that I’m going to end up falling in love, or getting married. Maybe 999 people who have stepped off the edge of this roof have fallen to the ground, but I won’t. I’m going to go in the other direction.”

Maybe other people get addicted to cigarette smoking, but not me.

Maybe other people need filters on their computers to guard them against pornography or chat rooms, but not me.

Peter thought he could walk right into temptation and stand with people around the fire. Friend, are you ever over-confident? Are there any areas of your life where you just walk into temptation because you will not acknowledge your weakness in an area? You can’t help but overspend. But I’m just going window-shopping. I’m not going to buy anything. I’m overweight and trying to diet. Why not purchase a bunch of desserts and stock up for the future. You and your girlfriend, or you and your

boyfriend can't keep your hands off each other. Let's sit alone on the sofa at night and snuggle.

We're supposed to pray, "Lord, lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." Is there any area of your life where you just deliberately walk into temptation? I don't think there was a difference between Peter's flesh and Judas' flesh, or between our flesh and Judas' flesh. I think that weakness can become wickedness. So what is our hope? One of my hopes is that Jesus is in control even of betrayal. We read in Jn. 18:4,

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Jesus knowing all that was going to happen, 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.

Jesus knows that he is going to be betrayed. He wasn't a victim. The reason Christ died is because he chose to die. No one took his life from him. He willingly laid it down. He announced to this group of thugs, "I am..." He revealed himself as the great I AM, Yahweh, the Lord, and they fell to the ground.

Let me speak an affectionate word to you. You may have been betrayed. Someone may have stabbed you in the back. You may have been ripped off. But Jesus is in control. He is the Lord. He understands betrayal. He can heal out of his great

empathy. He can heal your broken heart. He can heal your wounds. Jesus is not only the sovereign, he is the Savior. The same Jesus, who was denied by Peter, turned around and forgave Peter and restored him.

You know, I believe ultimately there was only one thing that separated Judas from Peter. Peter was willing to bring his sin to the light, to confess it to Christ, and he was forgiven. Judas hid his sin in the dark. Jesus would have, I believe, forgiven Judas had Judas confessed. But he refused. He could not believe that God was merciful enough to forgive his sins. And so in self-indulgent guilt, he went out and hung himself.

Jesus is the Savior. He longs to save you and I from the guilt of our sins. Let's pray.

The Betrayal and Denial of Christ

Rich Nathan

March 6-7, 2004

John: The Passion of Christ

John 18:1-11; 15-18; 25-27

- I. Betrayal
 - A. The Story of Traitors
 - B. The Story of Three Gardens
 - 1. Three Gardens
 - 2. Three Questions
 - C. The Story of Judas
 - 1. The Seriousness of Greed (Jn. 12:1-6)
 - 2. The Searing of Conscience (Jn. 13:21-27)
- II. Denial
 - A. The Denials (Jn. 18:15-18; 25-27)
 - B. The Sins
 - 1. Self-Indulgence (Mk. 8:32, 33)
 - 2. Self-Deception (Mt. 26:33-35)
- III. Salvation
 - A. Christ the Sovereign (Jn. 18:4-9)
 - B. Christ the Savior (Jn. 21)