

Why Did He Do It? – Matthew 26:47-50 (NIV) Holy Week – Maundy Thursday

While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people.

Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: “The one I kiss is the man; arrest him.”

Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, “Greetings, Rabbi!” and kissed him. Jesus replied, “Friend, do what you came for.”

This period of Lent is quickly drawing to a close. We began on Ash Wednesday with the sign of the cross, not only on our foreheads, but stamped indelibly on our hearts. We have followed Him now, these Lenten days, and we are with Him in Jerusalem. We ascend the stairs to the upper room. We push ourselves into a corner where we can watch unnoticed as He leads the disciples in the Passover Supper. We watch as He unexpectedly rises in the middle of the supper. What is He doing? He fills the slaves' basin with water and wraps the slave towel around his waist. What is he doing!? Why...He is going to wash their feet! Him! Rabbi! Why, He is not supposed to be washing their feet! This is the duty of the slave!

But there He is, washing their feet, doing slave's work. They look uncomfortable, and don't seem to know what to do, but they do not resist. Except Peter. Oh, does Peter ever resist! There are words, but we can't understand. John is right there; perhaps he can explain it to us later. Now he comes to the feet of Judas. What is that bewilderment on the face of Judas? We absolutely must talk to John later!

Now he is back at the table. More talk. Something between Him and Judas. Judas leaves abruptly. The Passover Supper comes to an end. They sing a hymn. What was that hymn? We don't recognize that hymn. But John—yes, our friend John can relate it to us later.

We follow them out and across the brook and into the Garden. Gethsemane. Oh how beautiful this garden is! But what is that commotion? Who are all those people? Soldiers! And those from the Sanhedrin. The soldiers have drawn swords and the others have knives and clubs. And Judas! What is Judas doing there? He seems to be leading them straight to Jesus. Why...why Judas just kissed Jesus! What does all of this mean? Where is John? We need to ask John!

But wait! The soldiers have arrested Jesus! They are dragging him away! Judas has a smirk on his face. Judas? Judas, what have you done? Have you led them to Jesus so they could arrest Him? But why? Why have you done this thing? Have you become His betrayer? But why, Judas?

Why did he do it? Judas? Betraying his (our) Lord? **Why did he do it?**

You know that Judas had seen the miracles: water becoming wine (and good wine!), the feeding of the 5,000, blind Bartimaeus receiving his sight, lame people walking again.

Judas was in the boat when Jesus stilled the storm. Judas saw Lazarus come forth from the death tomb. He was one of the chosen twelve, a member of the inner circle. Judas was there! **Why Did He Do It?** Judas—TRAITOR!! **But why...?**

Was it for greed (remember 30 pieces of silver is a lot of money!)? Was he a misguided Zealot?

None of the Gospel writers bother to tell us why Judas betrayed his Lord. They simply ignore the question of motive altogether. And that bothers me to no end! **Why** did he do it?

Why did he do it? Why did Berni Madoff use his incredible financial skills to create that mother of all ponzi schemes that would rob billions of dollars from so many people's future? I don't understand his motive, and that bothers me to no end!

Why did he do it? Why did the governor of South Carolina fly to Argentina to be with his mistress while telling us he was hiking the Appalachian Trail?

Why did she do it? Why did the female professor in Huntsville gun down her colleges like targets in a shooting gallery? What was her motive? I don't know, and it bothers me to no end, this not knowing!

Why did he do it? The adult sex offender over in Florida who snatched such a young, innocent, beautiful girl, rape her and discard her lifeless body in a garbage dumpster like some old rag doll?

Why did he do it? The leader of evangelicalism in this country, caught with a male prostitute and admitting to doing drugs also. How could a preacher, a proclaimer of the Gospel, allow himself to stoop to such deviate behavior in his denial and thus betrayal of his Lord? Why did he do it? I don't understand, and it bothers me to no end!

Perhaps the better question would be: Why did I do it? Why did you do it?

After all, every one of us has, at one time or another betrayed our Lord. Do not the scriptures say that all have sinned? Do not the scriptures say that there is none righteous, no not one? **Why did I do it? Why did you do it?**

What is the motive? As if we could only find a motive, and understand that motive, then perhaps the sin (and they are all sins!) would not seem so heinous.

It bothers me to no end not to know "motive" because I have been taught, yea, conditioned by society that to know the motivation behind the act, somehow justifies the sin, making it somehow less than a sin.

And so you hear the excuses that are intended to explain "motive" and thus give justification to the sin:

"My son was no racist before he was put in that Texas prison. They made a racist out of him in there. Not his fault. It is the prison's fault."

"My folks were both alcoholics, you know. I guess it just got passed down to me from them. Not my fault. Blame them."

“He started it! He hit me first! I was just acting in self-defense!”

“Listen, didn’t God give us our sexual desires? Then why am I blamed for fulfilling the desires God gave me? If you want to blame somebody, blame God!”

So what was Judas’ motive, his excuse? **Why did he do it?**

Carlyle Marney suggests that the gospel writers simply scape-goated Judas. After all “they all forsook him and fled.” Marney says the gospel writers were simply trying to hide their own betrayals, and in order to do so, they had to have a scape goat, and Judas with his thirty pieces of silver was ready-made.

On the other hand, Walter Wangerin poignantly reminds us that the motive of a sin—its rationale, its reasons—in no way make it any less than a sin. The betrayal of the Lordship of Jesus Christ in our lives is always a sin, no matter what the reasons were that caused us to betray Him.

Yet, every one of us—no exceptions—habitually try to defend our actions by telling everyone why we “just had to do it!”

Wangerin reminds us that we have this thing about motives, and therefore justification, exactly backwards. We invert the true source of our justification. It is never the motive, the preliminary cause before the sin that justifies the sin. Rather, it is the forgiveness of our Lord after the sin, which brings justification (...“therefore, being justified by faith...”)

If I committed the sin (and I did!) then I and I alone am responsible for the sin, regardless of the reasons (the motivations—the excuses) I put forth. Motives have nothing to do with the sin as a sin. Motives have nothing to do with the justification of the sin.

The Gospel writers and Wangerin are correct: Judas’ motives could neither justify nor condemn his betrayal of his Lord any more than stated.

If I use my excuses to attempt to duck my responsibilities for the sin, then I will never truly repent. And if I never truly repent, how can I ever experience the forgiveness of Christ, and therefore true Justification for the sin?

But if I own up to my sin, take full responsibility, and so repent, then the forgiveness promised by Christ (who cannot lie!) will justify even the most horrible betrayer of Jesus Christ, including Judas. And me. And you. After all, we are all Judas, aren’t we? (All have sinned and fallen short...) (There is none righteous, no not one.)

Forgetting motives, then, and owning up to our own betrayal of the Lordship of Jesus Christ in our lives, is our only hope.

Therefore, on this Maundy Thursday, let us confess—without excuses or attempts at justification—our sins, and claim those two blessed promises of 1 John 1:9; that if we will confess our sins, He will not only forgive those sins, but He will cleanse us from all (not part, but all!) unrighteousness.

Now, having confessed and repented, and having been forgiven and cleansed, let us leave this place with the words of Julia Johnston leaping from our lips, and flying to our hearts that have just been forgiven and cleansed:

*Marvelous grace of our loving Lord, Grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt;
Yonder on Calvary's mount out-poured, There where the blood of the Lamb was spilt.*

Dark is the stain that we cannot hide, What can avail to wash it away?
Look! There is flowing a crimson tide; Whiter than snow you may be today.

Marvelous, infinite, matchless grace, Freely bestowed on all who believe;
All who are longing to see His face, Will you this moment His grace receive?

Grace, grace, God's grace, Grace that will pardon and cleanse within;
Grace, grace, God's grace, Grace that is greater than all our sin.

And all of God's people said: Amen & Amen!!