

Betrayed

Luke 22:47-48 | December 27, 2020 | Bryce Beale

Christianity is primarily positive, not negative.

I do not mean that in a trite way, as though Christians only encourage everyone and never challenge them. That is not true.

But Christianity is positive before it is negative. That is, it *posits* or announces something true, and only afterward must *negate* those things which contradict the true thing it posits. It is inherently positive, but only negative by necessity since we live in a world of so many lies.

Here is a simple comparison to make this clear. I love my family; therefore, I do not want harm to come to them. So, something positive—I love my family—produces something negative—I don't want harm to come to them. The only reason I don't want them to be harmed is because I love them. If suddenly we lived in a world without the threat of harm, I would go on loving them. The negative only exists because of the sort of world we live in. But it does not work the other way. I cannot take away the positive thing, my love for my family, and expect the negative thing to go on by itself. If I stop loving them, then I no longer will fear their harm.

So, the positive thing is primary, and the negative thing is just a byproduct of the primary thing.

Christianity is the same way. It is fundamentally about positive things, true things we posit as Christians: God's love for us, our love for him, his beauty and goodness, the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ, his holy word, and our great responsibilities as his people.

The negative parts of Christianity are secondary and only exist because of the positive parts: God loves us, so we must negate the devil's claims to the contrary; we love him, so we must negate distractions to this love; God is beautiful and good, so we must negate any who claim otherwise; the gospel is true, so we with Paul must negate even angels from heaven who proclaim an altered one; the Bible is God's word, so we must negate challenges to its truth; and God's commands are holy, so we must stand against those who would change them.

The negative is absolutely necessary, but it is the positive that comes first.

That small book of Jude begins, “although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation [*positive*], I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith [*negative*].”¹ He could not have said it in reverse, this is the right and proper order.

I make mention of this simple fact because there is a disorder of the mind, common to our fallen humanity, that likes to exalt the negative above the positive. And we Christians are not immune.

For example, have you ever noticed that it is easier to read article after article of popular news on the internet than it is to read your Bible? Why? In part because the news articles can be like gossip, shocking you with the horrible things that people have done. You are offered a feast of negative things—criminals, deceitful politicians, messy celebrities. We naturally crave these things, but it is a broken craving. It is not a mark of health. And if we are not careful, these negative things can lift themselves up above the positive. We prefer to hear of a broken marriage instead of a solid one, or of a corrupt politician instead of a virtuous one. Evil, even evil that we disapprove of, becomes more exciting than good.

The Bible has very much negative in it, but never above the positive.

Our text today is one great example of this fact. We will behold the greatest evil ever committed in this world—I am not exaggerating. Yet when Scripture describes this act, the betrayal of Judas, it puts the spotlight not on Judas and his crime, but on Jesus and how he responds to it. Our text today is not about Judas—it is not primarily negative—it is about Jesus. He is the positive, and he is more fundamental than Judas.

Let us see then the greatest evil, the highest negative of all time, and may God direct our minds to see the great positive that underlies it and triumphs over it.

LUKE 22:47-48

¹ Jude 1:3 (ESV).

This is the first official scene of the passion of Jesus. His preparations are done; he has just finished surrendering his will in prayer up to the Father's, there in Gethsemane, a garden on the Mount of Olives east of Jerusalem. And as he reproves his disciples for falling asleep, this scene begins.

These two verses, though brief, record one of the most shocking and egregious actions of all time. Actually, the most egregious. As I have mentioned before, the Italian poet Dante, in his imaginary description of hell, put Judas in the lowest ring, right in the middle mouth of Satan himself. He calls that last spot of hell Judecca, named after Judas, and it is reserved for those who betray their lord.

But we do not need Dante's testimony, Scripture offers its more certain voice. Earlier this chapter when Jesus sat with his disciples in the upper room, he declared, "the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!"² Matthew and Mark add, "It would have been better for that man if he had not been born."³

And soon Jesus will say to Pilate, that Roman ruler who will send him to his unjust death, "he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin."⁴

So when Luke presents the most evil act in history, he does not try to hide its vileness. And yet, these two verses are not about Judas and his act. It is not mainly a negative passage; it serves a positive purpose. This is a passage about Jesus and how he handles so great an injustice, the hostility of sinners against himself.

These then are the two subjects we consider in these two verses: first the negative in Judas and his cruel act, but then the higher and more important positive in Jesus.

Judas

First then we turn our eyes to Judas and his act.

Verse 47 begins, "While he was still speaking, there came a crowd."

² Luke 22:22.

³ Matt. 26:24; Mark 14:21.

⁴ John 19:11.

Luke probably records the scene as it was experienced—there from within the garden lights are seen in the darkness, through the olive trees, westward toward Jerusalem and approaching. The sound of armor and the pounding of sandals against the earth reaches Jesus and his Eleven. They turn to look and first, before they can make out the face of Judas, they simply see a crowd.

Luke will tell us more about this crowd in verse 52: “Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders, who had come out against him...” The chief priests ran the temple and its sacrifices; the officers protected that holy place. And the elders were members of the land’s highest religious court, the Sanhedrin, who will very soon try and condemn Jesus.

The parallels in Matthew and Mark say that the crowd came *from* these religious leaders, which most likely means this was an armed mob that consisted of the religious leaders and the cronies they had enlisted to help them.⁵ Among these cronies was, as John tells us, a cohort of Roman soldiers.⁶ Rome and Israel—the pagan and the religious world—had joined hands to destroy Jesus, and they will keep their hands together throughout the passion.

Here is a cowardly mob come to overwhelm twelve fishermen in a garden, who have no more than two swords among them. But they come at night so that they can act unjustly without the rebuke of the people; and they come in force, to make sure they get what they want.

As the crowd comes closer, Jesus and his followers can make out the face of the one man walking ahead of them all. “[A]nd the man called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them.”

You probably do not know anyone today called Judas—here is the man called Judas, Judas Iscariot, who ensured by this evil act that no one in future generations would bear that name. We have no Benedicts, and we have no Judas’s. Though he is named after Judah, that great tribe of Israel that would produce both David and David’s Son, the Christ, still we do not apply to our children his name. We must use alternative versions of the name to avoid any association with Judas—we must, just like our English versions do of Jesus’ own brother, call our children Jude, or Judah.

⁵ Matt. 26:47; Mark 14:43; the servant of the high priest was present, for example.

⁶ John 18:3.

In fact, one of the other of the twelve disciples was named Judas, but the one time he is mentioned by this name, in John 14:22, he is called “Judas (not Iscariot).”

What did Judas do that won him so much guilt and scorn and unending shame?

Our text tells us. He had sold Jesus to the religious leaders of Jerusalem for thirty pieces of silver, so now he leads them to his Rabbi.

No word is more fitting for this act than “betrayal.” Our text takes the time to remind us that Judas is “one of the twelve.” This means that Judas was welcomed into Jesus’ confidence—after all, if he had not been in Jesus’ confidence, he would not have known where to find and betray Jesus now.

For three years Judas labored alongside the closest and most privileged of Jesus’ followers. He could be classed with those in Hebrews 6 who “have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away.”⁷ Judas probably did miracles with the rest; probably he cast out demons and won the admiration of the crowds.

Jesus had put the group’s moneybag into Judas’s hand—and Judas had secretly been pilfering from it.⁸ Jesus himself had chosen Judas, though he proved in the end to be a devil.⁹

He was one of the twelve! He was not a no-name enemy—Jesus had many of those. No, he was one who sat at table with Jesus in fellowship.

King David told of the pain of personal betrayal in his fifty-fifth Psalm, and I think his words foretold what Jesus must feel in our passage now:

For it is not an enemy who taunts me—
then I could bear it;
it is not an adversary who deals insolently with me—
then I could hide from him.

⁷ Vv. 4-6.

⁸ John 12:6.

⁹ John 6:70.

But it is you, a man, my equal,
my companion, my familiar friend.
We used to take sweet counsel together;
within God's house we walked in the throng.¹⁰

Or again, in Psalm 41: "Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me."¹¹

All of this marks Judas and his deed as worthy of the lowest parts of hell. He took what he had learned in the confidence of Christ, and used it to destroy him for personal gain.

Yet it is in that memorable manner of the betrayal that we see the depth of Judas's sin. "He drew near to Jesus to kiss him, but Jesus said to him, 'Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?'"

The word for "kiss" in Greek is *phileo* and usually means "to love" in a friendly way. Only by extension does it come to mean that act which, in all good and normal situations, is the expression of friendly love: the kiss, a friendly greeting in that context much as it still is in places like Italy today. To kiss is to greet a friend as a friend.

Luke does not tell us this but the other gospels do, and we could have guessed it here: Judas had agreed with the mob beforehand that he would point out Jesus to them by kissing him. It was dark and though there was a full moon, perhaps the trees would make it hard to spot Jesus. Or, perhaps some in the mob would not recognize him. So Judas would betray Jesus' identity to them with a kiss, a kiss of death.

Psalm 55 predicts this scenario to us again, in verse 21:

My companion stretched out his hand against his friends;
he violated his covenant.
His speech was smooth as butter,
yet war was in his heart;
his words were softer than oil,
yet they were drawn swords.

There truly is the shadow of every sin in Judas's transgression. Deceit—he deceives his companions. Violence—he hands Jesus

¹⁰ Vv. 12-14.

¹¹ V. 9.

over to be killed. Greed—he hands Jesus over for thirty pieces of silver. If the two greatest commandments are love for God and love for neighbor, here Judas commits the polar opposite of these both beyond what any human had ever done before him. He betrays both God and neighbor for the sake of his own gain.

Any here who have felt the sting of betrayal by a close confidante—maybe your spouse had a secret affair—know the agony of that circumstance.

Scripture does not dampen the evil of Judas's deed, then. And yet as I have said, nor does it make Judas's deed the focus of our story. Notice that here in Luke, we have not one word spoken by Judas. In Matthew and Mark, he speaks only two: "Greetings, Rabbi!"

Jesus

Judas is the negative; but the more fundamental thing is found in Jesus, the positive, the primary of our passage. Even the deed of Judas in the omnipotent hand of God is meant to point us to the glory of the Savior whom he betrays.

To that positive then we now look, for even these two brief verses are meant to turn our eyes upon Jesus, so that we may look full in his wonderful face.

See again the start of verse 37: "While he was still speaking."

The fact that the crowd interrupts Jesus' speech does heighten the drama of the scene, but it does more than that. What does it show us? It shows us that Jesus, not Judas, controlled this situation.

When we glance at the parallels to this passage, we find exactly what Jesus was saying when he was interrupted. Matthew and Mark read similarly: "the hour has come. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand." And while we was saying this, the crowd came.

We saw last week how the Eleven were caught sleeping by Jesus, when they should have been watching and praying. But when the crowd comes, they do not catch Jesus unawares. He knows it is time to be betrayed; he knows Judas, "the betrayer," is leading the crowd before he sees him.

And he says, "Rise, let us be going." Just who is coming to whom here? Is the crowd coming upon Jesus to trap him, or is Jesus going to the crowd? Who controls the situation?

John answers us clearly in his account, in chapter 18 of it:

Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, "Whom do you seek?" They answered him, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus said to them, "I am he."¹²

And so that fateful kiss of Judas, the worst act of history, was superfluous. It wasn't needed, it accomplished nothing at all except Judas's condemnation. Jesus came to them, they did not come to him. Jesus was not some common criminal hiding out in the woods, although that is how they are treating him. See what he says at the end of our paragraph in Luke: "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness."

Cowards! Who is being tied up and tried here? Not Jesus. His innocence speaks for itself, as does his enemies' guilt.

The Gospel of John continues its account, "Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them."¹³ Again he says nothing; here is his big scene, the highlight of his career. He simply was there.

And then we see a glimpse of Christ's power right afterward: "When Jesus said to them, 'I am he,' they drew back and fell to the ground." "I am he" is actually the divine title, "I AM." This lowly Jesus who has concealed his deity now reveals the tiniest fringe of it, and it knocks his enemies to the ground. When Peter tries to defend Jesus in next week's text, Matthew recounts this saying of Jesus: "Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?"¹⁴

The Roman cohort that had come out with Judas probably numbered a few hundred. One legion was six thousand men, and

¹² Vv. 14-15.

¹³ John 18:5.

¹⁴ Matt. 26:53.

Jesus could at once summon twelve, so seventy-two thousand men against maybe two hundred.¹⁵

Who is really in control of this situation? Judas, or Jesus?

Notice too in our text the only person speaking. “Jesus said to him, ‘Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?’” It is a rebuke, offered as a question to strike at Judas’s wicked heart. “Judas, I am not the one in trouble, it is you. Can you not see what you are doing, how low you have stooped?” Jesus is the teacher, even to his captors.

And lastly see what title our Savior uses of himself in that question: “Judas, would you betray *the Son of Man* with a kiss?” This was a title that God used in speaking with both Ezekiel and Daniel of old, and it does speak of their humanity. But when used of Christ, it speaks of much more than his humanity. It speaks of his authority.

Daniel 7 offers us the background to this title of Christ, in a prophecy:

I saw in the night visions,
and behold, with the clouds of heaven
there came one like a son of man,
and he came to the Ancient of Days
and was presented before him.
And to him was given dominion
and glory and a kingdom,
that all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve him;
his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
which shall not pass away,
and his kingdom one
that shall not be destroyed.¹⁶

So let me ask you again: who is our text about? Who here is really in control, who is the winner in this scene?

It is not Judas! He will soon after this throw his measly thirty coins in the temple from remorse, and go hang himself.

¹⁵ A Roman cohort was more than two hundred men, but it is likely that part of the cohort remained in Jerusalem.

¹⁶ V. 13-14.

Conclusion

This passage is about Jesus.

Yes, the negative part of our passage is necessary. The shocking deed is tabloid worthy, its heinousness is not hidden—only, it is not presented to us the way a tabloid would present it. The focus does not fall on the negative, even though it is the most appalling negative of all time.

But it is only so negative because it is trying to negate the greatest of all positives. Judas is so evil because he tried, for selfish gain and under devilish influence, to stamp out the embers of God born as a man.

But it is God born as man that even here wins our attention.

It would be easy in this season to fix our eyes upon negatives, upon political problems or the shocking deeds of others. It would be easy to spend our time speculating about the secret acts and plans and motivations of others, to suspect all others and to retreat into our small, safe bubbles.

And that would be an appropriate sort of behavior, if the story were about Judas. But it is not.

The story is about Jesus, the positive, the light of the world, who now makes his way slowly toward his cross upon the hill so that he may there undo all the evils of the world. They are not leading him to Golgotha, but Jesus is walking that way willingly, so that we might take refuge in the shadow of that cross from the righteous wrath of God against so corrupt a globe as our own.

One of the oldest English poems, written in a time when mighty warriors were an important part of society, is called “The Dream of the Rood,” or the “of the Cross,” and in it Christ’s cross tells of when that warrior Christ mounted him:

The young warrior stripped himself then—that was God Almighty—
strong and firm of purpose—he climbed up onto the high gallows,
magnificent in the sight of many. Then he wished to redeem mankind.
I quaked when the warrior embraced me—
yet I dared not bow to the ground, collapse

to earthly regions, but I had to stand there firm.
The rood was reared. I heaved the mighty king,
the Lord of Heaven—I dared not topple or reel.¹⁷

Who is in control in the chaos? Jesus, not Judas.

And who do you want to spend your time thinking of—poor pitiful
Judas and his tiny silver coins, or this powerful warrior of heaven?
Do you want your life to be consumed with the negative, the
crowds and the betrayal and the unjust trial, or with the positive,
the king who conquered over and even through this all?

It's not about Judas, it's about Jesus.

¹⁷ Lines 39-45; "Dream of the Rood," trans. Aaron K. Hostetter, *Old English Poetry Project*, Rutgers (updated Nov. 5, 2017), website.