

THE DANGER OF MERE PROFESSION

By Ron Harvey

TEXT: Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me.

Psalm 41:9

INTRODUCTION

Judas Iscariot, in his great despair after betraying Jesus, fled to a lonely hill and fashioned a noose and he threw the rope over a tree limb. (Mt. 27:5) And he put the noose around his neck. And he was on the side of the hill and he was about to cast himself off the hill and into eternity.

And as he stood there in lonely silence, I wonder what images must have rushed through his mind. You know, they say that when you are about to die, your life flashes before your eyes. And I wonder what must have flashed through the mind of Judas as he stood on the brink of hell.

Judas had been one of the most privileged men in all of history. He was one of the twelve disciples of Jesus.

Judas was called by Jesus (Luke 6:13)

Jesus himself called Judas to be one of the twelve. Jesus picked Judas and made him one of the team.

Judas was given miraculous powers (Matthew 10:1)

Judas apparently had power over unclean spirits to cast them out. Judas could heal all manner of diseases.

Judas was the treasurer (John 13:29)

Judas had a front row seat at the great sermons of Jesus

It is likely that Judas was seated near Jesus at the Sermon on the Mount. (Mt. 5:1-12)

He was there when Jesus taught on the Kingdom of God.

He heard the parables of Jesus and Jesus explained the parables privately to Judas and the other disciples.

Jesus privately instructed Judas and taught him how to pray.

“Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”

And Jesus instructed Judas day by day.

And Judas ate daily with Jesus. He sat around the table with Jesus and had fellowship together with him. They laughed, prayed and lived together.

And undoubtedly, Judas believed himself to be the very elect of God. And he professed himself to be a follower of Jesus. And he undoubtedly anticipated that he would one day enter heaven and would be welcomed in. And he professed Christ. And he went out and preached Christ and he healed the sick by the power of Christ. And he was a part of the inner circle of Christ.

So, how is it now that Judas stands on the precipice of hell, ready to cast himself off the side of the hill? How can it be that this man, this apostle, has a noose around his neck and has come to full despair? This man was a friend of Jesus. He had done many works in Jesus' name.

But remember what Jesus said,

“Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then, I will profess unto them, I never knew you. Depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

Matthew 7:22

I wonder if these words of Jesus echoed in the mind and heart of Judas as he stood alone on the edge of the cliff that day.

Judas was an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ and he was about to strangle himself and enter hell for eternity.

Do you remember the verse that we looked at last week?

Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.

Hebrews 4:1

If one of the original twelve apostles came up short, then how much more should we examine ourselves to make sure that we attain that rest.

Look at Hebrews 4:11

Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.

Hebrews 4:11

There are millions of people sitting in churches all around the world who are just as lost as Judas. There are many, many people who think they are OK in God's eyes because they have made a profession of faith. And not only have they made a profession of faith, but they acknowledge Christ every Sunday morning by attending church. And they may even come to church on Sunday night or Wednesday night.

But, ladies and gentlemen, Judas got up every day and was with Jesus. He professed Jesus every day. And Judas was not an idle professor. He worked the works of Jesus. He went out and preached in the various cities.

And yet, he was a mere professor of Christ, with no saving grace in his heart at all. And in the end, he came up short. And he ended up with a noose around his neck and Satan in his heart and hell on the horizon.

And people think that they belong to Christ because one day they uttered a prayer or because one day they stood up and professed to be a Christian. And they think they are forever secure because they got dunked in a baptistery somewhere.

And preachers make them feel secure by telling them that they are saved and that they are safe.

And yet, the Bible says, "Let us therefore fear, lest we come up short."

Churches are full to overflowing with people who show up on Sunday morning and then they are back in the bars and the dance halls on Monday night looking for someone to have an adulterous affair with. And some preacher somewhere is assuring them that they are saved. Once saved always saved, they say.

Maybe so, but there is no assurance for those who merely profess the name of Christ.

Did you know that people think they are saved because they go to mass once per week? They make an appearance in a huge cathedral, and watch human priests perform strange rituals and listen to a formal liturgy and they leave with every assurance that they are accepted before God.

And people go to every kind of church, Lutheran, Episcopal, Presbyterian, Methodist and even Baptist churches and they sit there for a few minutes each Sunday and they leave with a certain assurance because they have done their duty.

Hebrews 4:11 says, "Let us labour to enter into that rest."

Now this verse reminds us that there is a rest for the people of God. It is a rest that will be entered into in due course. It is a heavenly rest and an eternal rest. It is a magnificent rest that awaits the people of God when they step into heaven. (See Revelation 21:1-5)

1. This is a prepared place. (v.2)
2. If it is a prepared place. That means it is a real place.
3. It is a beautiful place. (v.2 "as a bride prepared for her husband")
4. God will be personally with his people. (v.3)
5. All sorrows and regrets will be erased. (v.4)
6. All things will be made new. (v.5)
7. It is a place of life. (v.6)
8. It is a place of rest. (Hebrews 4:1)

However, this rest is not now. Now is the time for labor. It says labor to enter into that rest.

Just as God worked for six days in creation and rested on the seventh day, there is a Christian work that must be done before there is an entering into rest.

The Christian life is an all-out commitment to Jesus Christ. It is no mere profession. It is not some token acknowledgment of Christ. It is not uttering a mere prayer. It is not performing a ritual. It is not putting on the face of Christianity. But it is the hard work of conforming your very life to the will of Christ.

Christianity is an all-out war for Jesus during this life.

Now we all know that your hard work does not purchase your way into heaven.

Not by works lest any man should boast.

But I tell you what your hard Christian labor will do. It will give you assurance of your salvation.

You see, if you make a profession of Christ and you get baptized and you join a church, but then you live the same old life that you lived before, the same old habits, the same old attitudes, the same old anger and hate, then you have no assurance that anything has happened in your life and in fact it hasn't happened because you are not changed.

When God saves you he makes you new. (See II Cor. 5:17)

But there is a process during this life of putting off that old man and putting on the new.

Let me show you another verse.

Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if you do these things, ye shall never fall.

II Peter 1:10

Now, what is it that we must do? It says, if ye do these things, ye shall never fall. And that implies that if you do not do these things, you may fall.

If you have believed in Christ and if you are truly saved and if you are, in fact, the elect of God with a promised rest someday in heaven, then your job during this life, your hard job, is to put off that old way of living and to put on the various aspects of the divine nature.

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: That by these you might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. (II Peter 1:3)

Now many people have no desire whatsoever to engage in the hard work of holy living. They prefer to merely name the name of Christ and leave it at that. And in the end, Jesus will say, "I never knew you."

Although Judas professed to be a follower of Jesus, he was a mere professor. His was an empty profession, a token acknowledgment. In three years of ministry with Jesus he never advanced in holiness. He never put on virtue or knowledge or temperance or patience or godliness.

Judas did not labor to enter into his rest. He did not give diligence to make his calling and election sure. He thought himself to be something when he was nothing.

And on that last night, at the last supper with Jesus, he sat around the table and he ate and drank and acted like a true disciple. But all the while, there was deceit in his heart. And while they dined together, Judas was plotting in his heart to turn Jesus over for thirty pieces of silver.

Judas fell that night. Just as all mere professors do. (See Rev.21:7) They come to the end and they fall. They come up short. Ultimately, they reject Christ, either by word or deed.

And if you are a mere professor, you can be sure that at the critical moment you will reject him too because your heart is evil and you can't control it. Though you dress up all pretty for church, your heart is as ugly as it ever was. And for just a bit of change, you will reject him too.

Judas left the dinner and went to the chief priests and they paid him thirty pieces of silver and Judas said, "The one I kiss is him."

Later that night Jesus and the other disciples went to their favorite spot, a garden called Gethsemane. And there Jesus began to shed his blood for the remission of sins. His anxiety and his suffering were so great that he sweated blood out of his pores. And he fell on his face in the dirt. And he wept and he prayed.

And while he was praying, he heard the soldiers coming up the road and Jesus told his disciples, "He that betrayeth me is at hand."

Then Judas came close to Jesus. So close that he could touch him. He was close enough to look in the face of Jesus and to look into his eyes. You would think if there was any spark of life in Judas that he would at the last instant change his mind. He stood face to face with Jesus. His heart must have been pounding at that moment. If ever there was a chance to repent and live this was it.

Judas had once heard Jesus say, *Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.*

But Judas did not come to Jesus for rest. He came to Jesus for 30 pieces of silver, for Judas, this professed follower of Christ, was a thief. And with his bag weighing heavy in his pocket, Judas came face to face with Jesus in the garden. Look at Matthew 26:47.

He spoke to Jesus. He said, *Hail master.* (v.49)

You see how easy it is to give lip service to Jesus. Judas says, *Hail Master*, when the words were merely pretence. Confession with the mouth is absolutely useless without believing in the heart. That's why the Scriptures say:

*That if thou shalt confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, **and** shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.*

Romans 10:9

Judas said, "Hail Master," but his heart was far from God.

Judas then kissed Jesus. Again, this would normally be a confession of affection. Not a **verbal** confession, but an **act** of confession. See how much I love Jesus, I kiss him on the cheek. But there is no love in the heart of Judas, only greed and all the other evidences of sin.

It is interesting to me here that the first word Jesus said to Judas after the kiss was friend. (v.50) Jesus would have been justified to call him villain or traitor or a fool or a child of the devil. But, he called him friend. And here is the sad thing. Judas **was** an earthly friend of Jesus. He **had been** a friend. He had walked the hills with Jesus. He had laughed with him, eaten with him. He had been one of the twelve. And Jesus called him friend. This would be the last time that Jesus would call Judas friend. At the final judgment, sadly, Jesus will tell Judas, "I never knew you."

Now Judas came upon Jesus with an evil kiss, but the guards came upon Jesus with evil hands. And they laid their wicked hands on Jesus. And we can imagine that they laid hands on Jesus roughly. Their intent was to put him to death and they no doubt would have done so at this moment with their swords and staves. But God said, No, evil hands. I will determine the moment when my Son shall be put to death.

They had an evil design to kill him, but the Scriptures say they were born along by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. (see v.56)

They hauled Jesus away down the road as a prisoner. From this point forward he would be treated as a criminal -- as though he were a murderer or a thief. Though he was faultless in all regards, he was punished for the crimes of others. He was our surety. He promised to pay the penalty that we could not pay. And so Matthew says they *took him* (v.50) under arrest and led him into the city.

Time prevents us from going much further this morning, but I would like to point out that in Matthew 26:56 Matthew tells us that the disciples forsook him and fled. And so, Jesus was left alone in the hands of sinners.

There was one other person that was left alone this night and that was Judas. Judas was an important man to the multitude when he was needed to lead them to Jesus. But after the deed was done, Judas was needed no more.

I suspect Judas stood there in the garden and watched as Jesus was buffeted and dragged down the road. And he saw the evil treatment of Jesus until the multitude rounded the curve and headed into the city. And Judas stood there alone. The disciples had fled away. The multitude had swarmed away with Jesus in tow. And the noise faded into the distance. And, perhaps Judas now stood alone in the garden.

Suddenly the great enormity of his sin became clear to him. The pleasant sound of money in his pocket now became a bitter taste in his stomach and he wanted to vomit it up like a bad meal. But he couldn't. And Judas was alone in his misery.

And the Scriptures are true when it says, "tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil." (Romans 2:9)

And multiply the tribulation and anguish by 1000 in the case of Judas.

Jesus said of Judas, it would have been better for him if he had never been born. And such can be said of all the reprobate. The Bible says, "Be sure, your sins will find you out." (Numbers 32:23)

But, there was hope yet for Judas. There he stood in the garden of Gethsemane. He could have followed the example of Jesus yet. He could have fallen on his face in the dirt and prayed more earnestly.

Do you see your sin now Judas? Then you may come to Jesus yet, for he is a merciful Savior. The blood of Jesus is being spilt at this very moment for sinners such as you, Judas. Stay in the garden a while, Judas, and find comfort for your soul. Find deep and lasting forgiveness in the blood of this man Jesus and then lie down and sleep in peace like the other disciples.

But, poor Judas, poor wicked Judas. He preferred to go to the Jewish authorities with his repentance. So, he left the place of Jesus' suffering, the place where he could have found comfort, and went to the temple to unload his guilt. He asked the Jews to take back their money and they would not. So, he threw down the silver on the floor. (Isn't that a lesson in itself? The fruits of sin are worthless.) But he could not find comfort for his soul.

So, Judas went out and found a tree overhanging a cliff and he strung the rope and fixed a noose for his own neck and he stood on the edge of eternity. And still, Judas could have found redemption.

Judas, take off the noose from around your own neck and run back to Gethsemane. Find the place where the sweat drops of blood fell to the ground, for there your sins may be washed away.

Do you know that while Judas was committing suicide over his guilt, Jesus at that very moment was shedding the blood that would have washed his guilt away.

But, in his deep despair Judas lunged over the edge and hung himself and so forever his soul will be in torment. And, not only his soul, but one day his resurrected body will be cast into hell.

There is no place in heaven for mere professors. You must be all out for Jesus. Christianity is an all or nothing religion. Judas found out that even apostles go to hell.

The Bible says, "Let us therefore fear, lest we come short." Do you fear for your soul?

Take heed all of you who fear for your souls. Don't step out into eternity guilty like Judas. Take the noose off from around your neck and come visit Gethsemane and reflect on the sufferings of Jesus. Think on the sweat drops of blood that were the first drops of earnest money paid for you.

Then take a walk down the road where Jesus was dragged into the city. Stop for a moment and look behind the temple gates where Jesus was scourged and beaten all night long.

Now walk on up the road to Calvary. But let me remind you that when you go, take nothing in your hands. You have nothing to offer for your sins. So, go empty handed. When you get to the cross wrap your arms around it and never ever let go. For it is true that there and there alone you may find peace for your troubled soul.