

DECLARATIONS OF INDEPENDENCE

(Luke 22:47-53)

August 27, 2017

Read Lu 22:47-53 – Sign on the door of a medical photographer's darkroom: "*Please keep darkroom door closed. If it is left open, all the dark leaks out.*" Wouldn't it be nice if it were that easy to get rid of moral darkness? We all have it you know. Part of our birth package. When it finds full expression, it is terrifying. Whether it is Hitler's holocaust, Stalin's purges, or the ISIS reign of terror, *moral darkness is horrific.*

But it's not limited to madmen. One psychiatric study after the war concluded, "*But conventional criteria, no more than 10% of the Hitler's SS could be considered 'abnormal.' The overwhelming majority would easily have passed all the psychiatric tests given to American army recruit or KC policemen.*" In ancient times, it was ordinary people who attended the theaters in Rome and Athens where condemned criminals performed the part of doomed characters and were killed on stage to entertain – not unlike the spectacle of our children's video games which avoid the inconvenience of having to clean up corpses afterwards. Joseph Conrad was right when he said that at the bottom of *every human existence lies a heart of darkness.*

Moral darkness is a declaration of independence from God. Dostoevsky said, "*If there is no God, everything is permitted.*" That's true whether we believe God doesn't exist – or just doesn't matter. Everything is permitted. We've declared independence – whether by genocide or simple insistence of my own selfish desires. The bad news is we're all guilty. The worse news is darkness is always destructive. The good news is there's a solution.

V. 53b: *But this is your hour, and the power of darkness.*" Jesus is referring to the death He is about to endure -- darkness in the most appalling form ever -- but imposed by common, everyday people. Not madmen. Not reprobates. Ordinary people. The heart of darkness is everywhere. Here God shows how easy it is to yield to darkness by declaring independence from Him.

I. Judas Declared Independence With a Kiss

Judas' name is rightfully synonymous with betrayal. Like Benedict Arnold, only worse. No one ever names their child Judas. But he was not viewed that way at the time. When Jesus predicted that one of His own would betray Him, the disciples didn't all turn around and look at Judas. **Lu 22:33:** "*And they*

began to question one another, which of **them** it could be who was going to do this.” They could see themselves doing this before Judas. **They liked him.** They trusted him with money. He preached the same message and performed the same miracles they did. He was one of the 12 closest people ever to Jesus. Advantage: Judas. And YET – Judas betrayed Jesus – not as an enemy, as a friend – not as a rebel, as a follower – not with a sword, with a kiss.

The depth of Judas’ heart of darkness is fully revealed in **Matt’s** account: **26:48:** “**Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, “The one I will kiss is the man; seize him.”** ⁴⁹ **And he came up to Jesus at once and said, “Greetings, Rabbi!” And he kissed him.**” Multiple times – a kiss on each cheek. Realize, in that culture the kiss was a sign of friendship and respect. But Jewish scholar Moses Aberbach writes that in any group of teacher and disciples, one never greeted his master first. That implied equality. Rather, he greeted the other disciples first, then the teacher, showing deference. Judas’ act was a deliberate insult – and **act of independence.** Judas was saying, “**I’m as good as you. We’re on equal footing.**” A declaration of independence.

Judas’ kiss also **betrayed the intimacy** it proclaimed. Imagine how that felt. When you betray someone, the closer you are the greater the pain, right? If someone I don’t even know says after the service, “**I hated this. I’m never coming back,**” I’d feel bad, but probably not for long. But if one of you I know well and have worked with for years says, “**I hated this. I’m never coming back.**” That cuts deep. I might never totally get over that. But if after the service my wife says, “**I hate this. I’m never coming back**” I’m devastated. That’s what Jesus experiences as Judas declares his independence with a kiss. A kiss that is not a kiss. The most devastating kind of betrayal.

Judas exemplifies betrayal from inside. We can declare independence from within – having sat in church for years, taken communion, been baptized, participated in outreach and mission trips, having given generously to the budget and building fund – having given everything, in fact, except our heart. **We kept that locked up tight. The outer show was to buy God off.** Deep within lurked a heart of darkness. There’s always a sign – some **secret life.** Judas looked great, but he’d been robbing the kitty. **Jn 12:6b:** “**He was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it.**” The secret life always helps itself to whatever it wants. Outward conformity doesn’t mean inward conversion. It can be betrayal with a kiss.

My preaching prof in seminary was a wonderful man – great family. One son went to seminary before me and I knew him briefly. A gifted and committed

teacher and preacher. A few years later my brother, Paul, got involved with an elite singing group in OC – high brow stuff – and this young man was in the group. I asked about him and found he had left the ministry. Further, he had a Buddhist shrine in his back yard. In his mind he hadn't left Jesus. Saw Him as a great prophet of enlightenment. Just didn't believe He was God. **Betrayed him -- with a kiss.** Most betrayers don't build shrines, but a lot of people betray Jesus right from the pew. A kiss of friendship from a heart of darkness.

Do you realize **every sin is a kiss of betrayal.** Every one. Every idle thought, word or deed is a declaration that my way is better than His – a declaration of equality. And every one tramples the heart of God like my wife saying, **“I hate this. I'll never be back.”** That's why **confession** is so important. The minute you see it, bow in confession. Don't betray Him with a kiss.

II. Peter Declared Independence With a Sword

Sidenote: All four gospels tell us about this misadventure, but only John mentions Peter by name. This is another sign of the validity of the Bible. No doubt Mt, Mark and Luke don't mention Peter because he's still alive when they are writing. They don't want to undermine his ministry. But Peter was martyred long before Jn wrote, so he gives a more detailed account.

Turn **Jn 18:4:** **“Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, “Whom do you seek?”⁵ They answered him, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus said to them, “I am he.”** [Only He didn't say, “I am he.” He said, “I am” – the OT name for God, Jehovah. And look what happened] **⁶ When Jesus said to them, “I am,” they drew back and fell to the ground.”** They got a small taste of what it means to oppose the power of Jehovah. This is Jesus demonstrating that He is not going to His death because He is powerless. He is **willingly** laying down His life for His friends. Jesus leaves no question who is actually in charge here. It is not the mob; it is **Jesus**.

Jn 18:10: **“Then Simon Peter, [emboldened by Jesus' power] having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.)¹¹ So Jesus said to Peter, “Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?”** Peter's going to help. But this is Simon; this is old Peter -- acting in his own fleshly effort, defending his reputation (having sworn to defend Jesus). He's willing to battle for the kingdom. But it's the wrong battle at the wrong time with the wrong weapon. This is **fleshly** effort, not Godly effort.

Jesus had already demonstrated He didn't need Peter's weapon or Peter's help. Jesus had told Peter multiple times what would happen, and Peter is still saying, "***Not on my watch.***" He's declaring independence with his sword. In defending Jesus in the wrong way at the wrong time, ***Peter is part of the hour of darkness.*** Jesus has to undo Peter's effort by healing Malchus' ear.

What a caution that is to us. Why? ***Because Peter is a believer!*** Peter is not in ultimate rebellion against God. He is not part of the lynch mob. But the ***darkness of his Simon heart is on full display as he tries to get good things in his own way.*** Christians can declare independence – not ultimate, by insisting on our way as opposed to God's way.

Abraham did it when he got a son by Sarah's maid and insisting, "***Oh that Ishmael might live before you!***" (Gen 17:18). "***Look what I did for you Lord.***" God had to send him away to make room for Isaac, the true son of promise. Moses did it when he killed an Egyptian in ***his*** effort to get God's deliverance. He did it again when he rebelliously struck the rock to get water after God told him to ***speak*** to the rock. God delivered the water, but it cost Moses the promised land. Saul did it when he illegally offered sacrifices because Samuel was late. It cost him the kingdom. All betrayals with the sword of human effort.

I attended a great church during college and seminary years, but near the end of that time, a couple of guys who were great evangelists went to a conference and came back all enthused about a methodology they thought should be implemented at the church. The leaders reviewed the ideas but found them lacking for our time and place. But these guys insisted until there was chaos. Splits. Dissension. In a church that was functioning great before that. The guys eventually moved on, and the church recovered, but never at the level it was before. With good motives they declared independence, revealing their self-centered hearts of darkness and inflicted great harm. Let's not go there. Oh, dear people, let's be seeking God's way for our lives together, not our own. Even as Xns we can join the darkness, but we must not.

III. The Crowd Declared Independence With Rejection

52 Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders, who had come out against him, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs?" Did you ever notice – the crowd is almost always wrong. Are you part of the crowd? This crowd had heard Jesus' message, seen His miracles, questioned Him closely and been challenged to believe in Him. And

their verdict? They could do without Him. Betrayal by rejection. The darkness of their hearts overcame the light of the world.

Jesus knew it would happen for many. He even knew why. **Jn 3:19**: “**And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.**” The crowd rejects Jesus to escape deny accountability. Any excuse will do to deny His person so they can continue doing whatever they please. He was good but not God. The disciples made up fairytales. Resurrection is impossible. Any excuse will do. Just so they can continue to be their own boss. Enlightened people reject all this. They take comfort that no one else in the crowd believes in Him either. They declare free agency and claim it’s an intellectual decision, but it’s not. **Rom 1:18** they “**by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.**” In Jesus’ words they “**loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.**” It’s not a head issue; it’s a heart issue. They don’t want Him to be right.

Philosopher Thomas Nagel confesses that tho an atheist, he fears religion. He says, “*It isn’t just that I don’t believe in God and, naturally, hope that I’m right in my belief. It’s that I hope there is no God! I don’t want there to be a God: I don’t want the universe to be like that.” Like what? Like one where there’s accountability. That’s not an intellectual decision; it’s the fruit of a heart of darkness which prefers meaninglessness to accountability. Aldous Huxley was brutally honest explaining why he and his friends rejected Jesus and God: “*We objected to the morality because it interfered with our sexual freedom.*” **Exactly!** Just as Jesus said: “**people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.**” There’s no proof that Jesus wasn’t real; the resurrection proves He was. But there’s a world of proof that hearts of darkness love their sin more than Him. Rejection – driven by the need to deny accountability. God responds: **Rom 14:12**: “**So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.**” You can deny reality right up to that moment; then there will be no more escaping reality, but also no more salvation. The way of the crowd is the way of destruction. ---- But – there is a solution!*

IV. Jesus Declared Dependence With Submission

We’ve seen Judas, Peter and the crowd. But there’s one more player here. There’s Jesus. Of what does He declare independence? Nothing! **Not even the darkness,** and that’s good news for us. Jesus declares His **dependence** by **submitting** to the will of the Father that He give darkness its hour. That is what is necessary to ultimately defeat the darkness. He’s already shown that with one word He could sweep away this whole scene. He has every right to

do so. But instead he submits. **V. 53b:** “**But this is your hour, and the power of darkness.**” So why did He do it? Tim Keller puts it this way. Centuries ago God put Adam in the garden with a tree and said, “**Obey me about the tree. Don’t eat it. Obey about the tree and you will live.**” Adam failed that simplest of tests – resulting in the brokenness of human existence we experience today.

But now, in another garden, another Adam and another tree. This time it’s a cross. Again God says, “**Obey me about the tree**” – only there a huge contrast here. The first Adam was told ‘**Obey me about the tree and you will live.**’ Jesus is told, ‘**Obey me about the tree -- and I will crush you to powder.**’ Jesus was told something God never said to anyone before and will never say again. But **He had to say it once.** He had to say it once to **reverse the previous failure.** And Jesus did it. Jesus submitted to the hour of darkness – taking it into Himself so we could live in the light that never goes out.

This is the only thing that will address our heart of darkness. The light of the world. Jesus took our place, paid our price, so that we can have His light in place of our darkness. **Col 1:** ¹³ **He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,** ¹⁴ **in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”** Based on His submission, He offered Judas one more chance; Judas rejected. He offered Peter forgiveness and restoration; he accepted. He offers the crowd one more chance. Most align with the hour of darkness. “**This is your hour!**” But remember – an hour is not a very long time. Before making that deal, best ask, is it going to be worth it?

Conc – All of us declare our independence with every sin. But Jesus paid the price for our dark heart. We can be made clean – by throwing ourselves on His mercy. Come to the light, Beloved. If you’ve never confessed Him as Lord and Savior, do it today. If as a believer you need to confess your sin, do it now. He took your darkness so you could live in His light.

When the Romans attacked Syracuse in 214 BC there was no defense against their ships. But the mathematician, Archimedes came up with a brilliant solution. He installed a bank of mirrors on shore, trained them on the Roman ships and the focused light ignited them on fire. True or not it illustrates the point. Darkness had its hour, but Jesus overcame it. Because of that He stands ready to overcome your heart of darkness. But you must cease your free agency, declare dependence on Him and receive His forgiveness. His light for your darkness – a trade well worth making. Let’s pray.