

What Do You Call Someone Who Betrayed You?

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A few weeks ago I wore a **Ricky Russ** t-shirt to church--the one posted with this blog. As I engaged people in conversation I'd point to the t-shirt and ask, "What do you think of this?"

They'd tilt their head to one side and say, "I don't know? What does it mean?"

That's when I'd ask, "Do you know what Jesus called Judas when Judas betrayed him?"

It's not a question most of us have considered and so after a silent delay, I told them, "At the moment Judas betrayed him, Jesus called Judas, 'Friend.'"

When You're Betrayed

And then I asked a personal question: "What do we call someone the moment they betray us?"

Without exception everyone I asked said they don't call them, "Friend."

All of this got me thinking about what Judas did next. Once he realized Jesus had been condemned Matthew 27:3-5 tells us, *When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. ⁴ 'I have sinned,' he said, 'for I have betrayed innocent blood.'*

'What is that to us?' they replied. 'You take care of it.'

⁵ *So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself.*

It seems Judas hoped by returning the money he could reverse the consequences of his actions. Did he think once the chief priests and elders had the silver in hand they would convince Pilate to change his decision? Instead the Jews told Judas: "you take care of it."

Why Did Judas Hang Himself?

I think the answer to that question is found in the words of Moses. According to Deuteronomy 19:16-21 anyone complicit in the death of an innocent person must suffer the penalty of the condemned party: "Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot" (Deut. 19:21). Judas, in an act of self-condemnation, exercised justice upon himself.

Jesus hung from a cross and Judas hung from a tree.

Having spent three years with The King of the Jews, the betrayer never understood that Jesus was the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. He failed to see that even his horrendous act of betrayal would be paid for by Jesus. And so he did what we often do, he punished himself: Life for life.

Meanwhile, the moment after Peter denied Jesus a third time, the Lord looked at him and, *"Immediately a rooster crowed. ⁷⁵ Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: "Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly"* (Matt. 26:74-75).

Before Peter denied Jesus the Lord also called him friend. It was earlier in the night, prior to Gethsemane, prior to Peter's threefold denials, Jesus told the disciples, "I no longer call you servants, for the servant doesn't know what their master does. But I've called you friends, for everything I've heard from My Father, I've made known to you.

"You didn't choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He will give you. "This is what I command you: love one another. "If the world hates you, you know it hated Me before it hated you." (John 15:15).

Two friends. One betrayed the Lord, the other denied knowing him. Later, after his resurrection, Jesus appeared alone to Peter. We don't know what Jesus said, but we know he extended forgiveness and Peter accepted it. Later, the Lord would commission Peter to care for his flock.

Let's Choose Forgiveness and Friendship

We all face a choice after we betray or deny Jesus. Something we've all done. Regardless of how we've betrayed him, or how often we've denied him, Jesus calls us friends.

We can reject the Lord's offer of friendship, place a noose of self-condemnation around our mind, and mentally hang ourselves. Such an act demonstrates we've bought into the lie that we're beyond forgiveness and must punish ourselves for our wrongdoings.

There is a better way. Let's follow the example of Peter and accept the Lord's forgiveness and friendship and move forward with him. And in the future, instead of cursing those who betray us, let's call them friend.

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