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“Assisted Suicide . . . and the vital element that is never considered”



A sermon preached in Kilskeery Free Presbyterian Church on Lord's Day 2nd February 2003 by Rev. Ivan Foster.

The incident which prompted the sermon was the suicide of Mr. Reginald Crew. Here is a summary of the reports found in the news media of this incident.

A man who was terminally ill with motor neurone disease has died after his assisted suicide bid went ahead in Switzerland. Reginald Crew, 74, from Hunt's Cross, Liverpool, is thought to be one of the first UK citizens to take advantage of more relaxed laws on assisted suicide in the country. Assisted suicide remains illegal in the UK, despite a number of legal challenges. Mr Crew ended his life just after 1400 GMT on Monday, 26th January, with a fatal dose of barbiturates, prepared by a doctor. Mr Crew had suffered from the debilitating disease for more than four years. Motor neurone disease has the effect of a creeping paralysis - for which there is no cure. Mr Crew killed himself with the help of the "assisted suicide group" Dignitas in Switzerland. "Live with dignity, die with dignity" is the slogan of the Swiss charity, Dignitas. The group has caught the headlines as people with chronic diseases from around the world travel to Switzerland to ask for its help in committing suicide. Founded in 1998, Dignitas has now helped 146 people die - more than two-thirds of them foreigners. "What we are doing is a friendly act... we have never had a problem with police," said director Ludwig Minelli. Once the decision has been made, the patient travels to Zurich where he or she is taken to a Dignitas flat to administer the dose of barbiturates which will end his or her life. This will be your last drink - after it's over, you will sleep two to five minutes and afterwards you will die.

"But what then of the soul?" the Christian must ask!

"Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, what is that to us? see thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself," Matthew 27:3-5.

It is a feature of Christian grace to live patiently until God's time for our dying comes about, irrespective of whatever painful circumstances may be ours, and to die submissively when God's time for our departure approaches, irrespective of the pleasant circumstances in which we may find ourselves and in which nature may desire to continue for a while. Thus Paul faced his death, the cruel death of a Christian martyr. "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand," 2 Timothy 4:6. In life and in death, the Christian deems the will of God "good, and acceptable, and perfect" (Rom 12:2). With



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Paul, the Christian would wish to say: "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain," Philippians 1:21. With the sinner it is not so. He would live how he likes and die when he likes. God's time is never his time. God's will is never good or acceptable. If death were not attended by great physical and mental weakness whereby the dying are unable to voice or manifest their resistance to dying, then I think that this truth would be far more obvious on the death-beds of many.

The news

Suicide has been in the news of late. A man whose physical condition had greatly deteriorated because he suffered from motor neurone disease, travelled to Switzerland and there, because the law permitted it, was allowed access to a poisonous drink. He died shortly after drinking it. For many, that is how the matter of terminal illness should be handled. However, for the Christian, the teaching of the sixth commandment forbids the promoting of our own death. The law of God teaches: "Thou shalt not kill," Exodus 20:13. Under this commandment suicide is forbidden. *The Shorter Catechism*, in answer to question 69, which asks; "What is forbidden in the sixth commandment?" states: "The sixth commandment forbiddeth the taking away of our own life, or the life of our neighbour unjustly, or whatsoever tendeth thereunto."

Horror

When I heard the brief news bulletin report of his death, a cold horror gripped my soul as I imagined his thoughts just then, now that he had entered eternity. How differently his earthly circumstances would have appeared unto him then! I have no doubt that he would have gladly returned to the suffering of life in order to escape the horrors into which he had cast himself.

I wish to speak upon the subject of suicide tonight because many are engaged in nothing short of their own destruction though they think it not. The majority travel a road unwittingly, to their own destruction, resisting all attempts to warn them of their danger. "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat," Matthew 7:13.

I wish to centre my thoughts upon the suicide of Judas, Matthew 27:3-5.

Judas is the most infamous of suicides. But all suicides run parallel to his. Indeed, the Bible's record of his death provides us with an insight into the thinking of a suicide which is not possible in all the analyses recorded by men of such hopeless and desperate action by men.

I. JUDAS ACTED UNDER THE CONTROL OF THE DEVIL

"Then entered Satan into Judas surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve," Luke 22:3. The closing events in the life of this man so highly favoured were carried out under the influence of the one called the deceiver of nations, (Revelation 20:3). It was not just in his betrayal of Christ that he acted under Satan's malign influence. His suicide was



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also the result of the devil's promptings.

1. The devil is a deceiver. Judas was deceived. He had been deceived about the worth of the 30 pieces of silver which he had received as payment for betraying the Saviour. After the deed was done, they became so valueless that he threw them away, verse 5. He was deceived about Christ. He had placed a very low value on the Saviour when he sold Him for 30 pieces of silver.

Perhaps Judas thought that the Saviour would remove Himself from the hands of His persecutors as he had seen Him do on many occasions before. John 10: 39 is an example of the Saviour escaping the evil intentions of men. "Therefore they sought again to take him: but he escaped out of their hand." There were other occasions as well, Luke 4: 29-30, John 8: 59. What Judas did not understand was that the Saviour had a reason for escaping from these attempts to kill Him.

We are told in John 7: 30 what that reason was. "Then they sought to take him: but no man laid hands on him, because his hour was not yet come," John 7: 30. "His hour had not yet come," the hour of His death which was planned from all eternity and from which, when it came about, He would not seek to escape.

Now Judas is deceived about his own death. Seeking to cut himself off from the environment of his treachery and to escape the misery he had brought on himself, killing himself was his ultimate folly. This was no means of escape. Rather it was the opposite; utter damnation awaited him in that place to which he hastened. In hell, Judas realised the three-fold dupe that he had been.

2. The devil is a blinder of men. "In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them," 2 Cor 4: 4. How the devil blinds men to the true consequences of their folly! The Saviour had warned Judas clearly of the dreadfulness of the crime he was contemplating. "And as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me. And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I? And he answered and said, He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me. The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born. Then Judas, which betrayed him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said," Matthew 26: 21-25. Was this not warning enough for Judas? The devil blinded his mind to the wickedness of that which he was contemplating. There are ominous words sounded in John 13: 30. "He then having received the sop went immediately out: and it was night," John 13: 30. It was dark indeed, especially within the mind and soul of Judas!

3. The devil is a murderer. He delights to kill. He had turned Judas' hand to the murder of the Saviour. Now he would have Judas murder himself. Self-destruction is what the devil plans for every sinner. Read these verses for they illustrate this truth: 2 Kings 17: 7-18; Isaiah 3: 9, 11; Jeremiah 2: 17, 19.

II. AS HE SOON RECONSIDERED THE VALUE OF THE SILVER, SO HE ALSO SOON REVALUED SUICIDE.



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1. That which is gained at the cost of Christ, is of no value. The silver took on a new value in the light of his realisation of what he had done. He had betrayed the innocent blood, verse 4. The true nature of sin is only seen by the sinner after he has committed it. God faithfully tells him the nature of sin but the sinner will not believe God. After he has committed the transgression, then he realises that the matter is not how he first saw it. Then he realises that he has played the fool. For all eternity, Judas will suffer the self-reproach of the fool, as will all who thought that suicide was an escape from life's miseries.

2. Whatever joys men may anticipate springing from sin will prove an utter disappointment. The silver was thrown away. The very joy becomes a misery, even as the silver became a torment to Judas. The suicide will find that the relief they were persuaded would follow their death will prove false.

II. AS JUDAS FOUND IT IMPOSSIBLE TO UNDO HIS BETRAYAL OF CHRIST SO THE SUICIDE WILL FIND IT IMPOSSIBLE TO UNDO HIS TRAGIC ERROR.

1. Judas sought to undo his crime, as much as in him lay. He publicly acknowledged his wrong and that to those who crucified Christ. He tried to return the money to those who gave it him. But even that simple matter was impossible. He found no ease for the guilt that bore down upon his heart and soul.

2. An unbearable despair took hold upon him and he ended his life. But that too was a futile step. As confessing his sin to men failed to gain him pardon, so ending his own life failed to end his misery. There is no hope for the one who rejects Christ, the only Hope of sinners.

3. The Christ-rejector's eternity is one of unending and unattainable longing to end the sufferings of hell.

The sense of regret and despair that filled Judas' heart and drove him to suicide still burns within the wretched soul of that man who thought that he could sell Christ for profit.

Let the dreadful picture of that despairing soul given us in our text warn the Christ-rejector of the eternal despair that awaits those who follow in Judas' footsteps.

"Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die?" Ezekiel 33: 11.