

THE SACRIFICE

By Thomas E. Witherspoon

The first rays of the morning sun sought out and pierced every crevice in the tiny clay hut where he had spent the night. He welcomed the intrusion of light and warmth, for his body had been racked with great sieges of shivering all during the dark hours. He raised himself from the crumpled position on the damp earthen floor and leaned heavily against a wall. Here he could more readily accept the sun's invitation of warmth and he could bask in its beams.

Through eyes that were reddened from much weeping during the night, he gazed about him and he was further saddened by the stark emptiness of the surroundings. He wished, but only momentarily, that he had not gone away from the others the night before, but he knew then - and now - that it was necessary for him to be alone with the Father and to make sure that his inner guidance was leading him in the right direction.

Deep within him, however, came the cry, as he stood there in the sunlight, "*Why me, Father? Why me?*" His thoughts turned to his mother and he wondered if she would understand why he must do what was to be done. He thought of the friends he had made during the three-year period of ministry in Galilee, Judea, and Samaria, and he wondered if the others would carry on the work that had been started. He wondered how the betrayal would take place, and if there were any way it could be avoided.

Suddenly, with great determination, he gently wiped away these concerns, thoughts, and ideas, and prepared himself to face what he must. He stood in the open doorway of the hut and prayed silently, trying to prepare himself mentally and spiritually for the task ahead of him. Soon, he would rejoin the others who had slept in a nearby house, but first it was imperative for him to do something about his physical appearance. With critical eyes he scanned the garment he was wearing, wishing he could cleanse it, but there was hardly enough water to drink in this arid land. His

thoughts turned back to his mother again and he remembered the day she had given him his white robe, and again tears filled his eyes. Now one could hardly tell that it was white, for it was covered with the grime of three years of travel. He stepped back into the hut and returned to the corner where he had slept, then he removed the garment and shook it vigorously. Instantly particles of dust filled the room and began to settle on his slender body. It was a body that was feminine in appearance, soft and virtually hairless, yet unquestionably masculine at the same time. It, too, needed cleansing, for it had been weeks, perhaps months, since he had walked the shores of the Jordan and soaked in its tepid waters.

As he stood there in the shower of dust, his mind went back to that fateful day three years earlier when he had started the quest. He remembered the sad good-byes from his mother, his brothers and sisters, and his friends. Some, not his true friends, had called him insane, or said that he was possessed. But he knew that his mission in life was to help heal the sick, feed the hungry, and bring peace to the soul of man. He knew then, as now, what he had to do, and he set out on the adventure that had brought him here.

Now it was time to go. He pulled the robe about his body and secured it tightly at the waist with a purple sash. He smiled as he recalled his good fortune at finding the sash a few days earlier on the road into Jerusalem. Peter, as always impetuous, had been envious at first but then he told him, *"It truly makes you look like a king!"*

As he approached the doorway of the little hut again he ran his fingers through his thickly matted hair and managed to separate a few strands. Turning next to his beard he pried loose several particles of food that had somehow missed his mouth at the supper the night before. For his last act of physical preparation, he spat into his hands and moistened his face, erasing a bit of the dust that had collected there. Finally, he was ready, and he stepped briskly away from the little hut, anxious to carry out the lot in life he had drawn, that of fulfilling God's will of self-sacrifice for the good of all mankind.

A few paces down the dusty trail, he turned and violently hurled a small leather pouch against the sunbaked walls of the hut. The pouch burst open and silver coins fell to the earth. He walked rapidly toward a kiss for his Master, knowing that he must sacrifice himself for the One who would sacrifice Himself for all. Judas Iscariot never looked back.

Judas has been one of the most maligned individuals in all of history. His name has been damned by millions, and his memory is indelibly linked to the word betrayal. Yet, Judas had a role to play in his life, and he did what he had to do. He should not be condemned because he was an instrument of God. Jesus had to die so that He could be resurrected and live again. The betrayal was part of God's plan for good, and Judas, who loved Jesus and wanted to see Him become the literal king of the Jews, meant well.

He was a good man, a spiritual man, or Jesus would not have chosen him to be one of the twelve disciples. Jesus knew Judas' role, and He accepted it as part of the overall plan.

Let us look upon Judas more kindly. Let us not continue to judge him harshly. Jesus forgave him for his act. We must too. Let us know that whatever the appearances, we must look for the good in every situation and we must understand that God has everything under control. Each of us has a role to play in life, and as we follow our own inner guidance that role will be revealed to us. We may be judged falsely, and harshly, but we must do what we must do—just as Judas did.

NOTE: On the spiritual level, Eric Butterworth wrote that Judas was an instrument, playing a destiny-chosen role in the dramatic portrayal of the greatest demonstration ever made. ~ Sallye Taylor