

Running after Judas

Philippians 3:18-20a

Aiming Higher. Part 6

I have a clipping from a Christian magazine from many years ago. It's a parable of sorts, and it responds as it were to the names of 12 disciples submitted by the Lord as He begins His ministry. I think you'll get the point.

From the office of the Jordan Management Consultant Firm: "Thank you for submitting the resumes of the twelve men you have selected for management positions in your new ministry organization. All of them have now taken our battery of tests and interviews and it is our unanimous opinion that most of your nominees are lacking in background, education and vocational aptitude.

They do not demonstrate a team concept and have little, if any, managerial abilities and proven capabilities.

Simon Peter is emotionally unstable and given to an offensive temper. Andrew is not a leader and prefers to remain anonymous. James and John, brothers from the family of Zebedee, will more than likely place personal interest above company loyalty. Frankly, they are mama's boys.

Thomas harbors serious doubts and will no doubt undermine morale.

James and Thaddaeus have leanings toward a radical social agenda.

We feel it is our duty to tell you that Matthew has been listed by our greater Jerusalem Better Business Bureau as a tax collector who has made a fortune through fraud.

However, we are pleased to inform you that one of your candidates shows great potential. He's a man of resourcefulness, a keen business mind, adept at finances, highly motivated and personally

ambitious. We recommend as your chief financial officer and right hand man, Judas Iscariot."

Time has certainly changed our opinion on that score, hasn't it?

However, when you go back and analyze the events of their 3 year of ministry – right up to the end – no one suspected Judas as the traitor. In fact, as far as the other disciples knew, Judas was the one who seemed to have it together; and the disciple most likely to fail miserably or say something ridiculous was Peter.

Eugene Peterson provoked my thinking when he wrote, Judas was a success in today's world view; he cleverly arranged to control the money of the apostolic band; he skillfully manipulated the religious and political leaders of his day to follow his agenda.

Peter was a failure in ways that we most dread: under pressure he collapsed, a blustering coward.

But time revealed Judas to be a self-seeking rejecter of Christ; and Peter to be a repentant follower of Christ.

So here's the question; why is it that the world, and even the church at large, chases after the lifestyle of Judas – hungering for financial control and material possessions; resting on political influence and an invitation to the seat of power; manipulating people for personal promotion; and living life with one's own agenda in mind.¹

Let me rephrase the question in one simple sentence, "Why are so many people running after Judas?"

Throughout the Bible, the idea of running is used as a metaphor to reveal someone's direction and passion in life.

- Paul wrote, *You were running so well, who hindered from obeying the truth? (Galatians 5:7)*
- Paul wrote that he was *holding fast the word of life, so that he wouldn't run in vain (Philippians 2:16)*.
- The writer of Hebrews wrote, *Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us (Hebrews 12:1)*
- Peter wrote that the believers were no longer *running with unbelievers in their sensuality (1 Peter 4:4)*.

Today we use the same language.

We say things like “He’s running after the world” . . . we might even say of ourselves, “I’m not running with that crowd anymore.”

The idea of walking also matches the same idea of running in the right direction:

- In *Genesis 5:24* we read that *Enoch walked with God*.
- David, the Psalmist wrote, *Teach me your way, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth (Psalm 86:11)*.

The New Testament believer is challenged to:

- *To walk by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7);*
- *To walk by the Spirit so that you won't carry out the desires of the flesh (Galatians 5:16)*.

How a person moves is a telling metaphor. Even Broadway or television shows the hero walking confidently, while the villain just sort of slinks across the stage.ⁱⁱ

We picture Judas slinking after the wrong things. We picture the world racing in the wrong direction.

The question for the believer is this – which direction are we walking? Are we actually running after Judas and our own agenda . . . does our walk look more like the world’s way of walking?

If you take your New Testament and return to Paul’s letter to the Philippians, he’s making much out of the very same thought.

If you were with us in our last few studies, Paul has written about running after the prize of God’s glory.

You might remember how in *verse 17 of chapter 3* he talks about walking after holy examples.

Notice – *Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.*

In other words, walk like other people who walk with God. Imitate holy people as they imitate Jesus Christ. Now what Paul does next is contrast the right kind of walking – the right kind of running – with people who are racing after the wrong thing.

In my mind, I see them running after Judas – after a life that ultimately rejects God.

And while Paul is gonna describe the unbeliever – it serves as a challenging mirror to evaluate the nature of our own walk with God.

Notice how Paul describes the world – *verse 18. For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ.*

Two statements in this text might surprise you.

- First, that Paul would call unbelievers actual *enemies of the cross*.

If you went out on the street and asked people, are you an enemy of God, very few, if any would say, “You bet! I am without a doubt one of God’s enemies.”

No . . . they would say, “I’m not an enemy of God. I don’t feel like I’m his enemy – and I certainly don’t feel like He thinks He’s my enemy . . . what are you talking about?”

The truth is, we are no more capable of judging our own relationship with God apart from His word, than a patient who’s doctor says to him, “You’ve got terminal, inoperable, cancer” and the patient says, “But I feel great. I don’t feel like I’ve got cancer – it can’t be true.”ⁱⁱⁱ

To reject the cross is more than rejecting a wooden symbol of death –

- it is to reject the priceless gift of the life and bloodshed of God’s own Son;
- it is to defy the Creator;
- it is to ignore the terms of peace and reconciliation between God and man; it is to reject the gospel is to be an opponent of Christ, whether someone feels it or not.

James writes in his letter, *Do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the*

world makes himself an enemy of God.” (James 4:4).

It doesn't matter who you are; it doesn't matter what your resume says about you; it doesn't matter what you think about yourself or what other people say about you – as long as you reject the gospel, you are – listen to this horrifying thought – you are an enemy of God.

And this is the present status of the unbelieving world – Paul writes here – ***they are enemies of the cross.***

- b. The second statement that might be surprising here in ***verse 18***, is Paul's emotion as he writes, ***I now tell you even weeping.***

As Paul begins to describe the unbeliever, tears are beginning to trickle down his cheeks.

We know that Paul wept:

- he wept as he warned the Ephesian elders and the Flock (***Acts 20***)
- he wept over the influence of false teachers (***Romans 9***)
- he wept as he expressed his loving concern for the wayward church in Corinth (***2 Corinthians 2***)

But here in ***Philippians 3***, this is the only place in the New Testament where Paul speaks of crying in the present tense.^{iv}

In other words, when you read this paragraph, you need to see these lines spotted and the ink running a bit as it mixes with the tears of the Apostle.

And I say all of that because Paul is worthy of imitation in so many areas – and this is another area. Paul wept over unbelievers like Jesus Christ wept over unbelieving Jerusalem (***Luke 19:41***).

There's absolutely no hint here of Paul saying, “Well, those unbelievers are gonna go to Hell and good riddance.” No Christian should ever entertain that kind of spirit toward the lost. In fact, the more you know about the coming judgment, the more you are moved to compassion and urgency and prayer and outreach.

Charles Spurgeon, the famous pastor in the 1800's wrote, If sinners are going to be damned, at least let them leap into Hell over our dead bodies. If

they [are to] perish, let them perish with our arms wrapped around their knees, begging them to stay. If Hell [is going to be] filled . . . let not one go there unprayed for and unwarned.

I remember as a boy reading those little booklets my father used to give to sailors on the streets of Norfolk, VA as they would pour in from the ships for a weekend of reveling; I can still remember 50 years ago the prostitutes standing in the doorway of their parlors calling out to them; I saw men stumble into the alleys and throw up from all they had been drinking.

In one of those little booklets, I remember the artist showed a broad highway packed with people walking on it and you could see ahead where the artist showed the highway suddenly ending at a precipice and people falling plunging into the flames of an eternal Hell.

That marked me. First of all, I didn't wanna be one of them. Secondly, I wanted to warn people of their coming judgment before God.

When we see people walking through life self-destructing; when we watch our world running like Judas toward their own ambition in life, it should provoke in us greater pity and passion to do everything we can to rescue them, by the grace and providence of God.

And with tears streaming down his face, Paul now describes the unbelieving world four different ways.

1. First, their condemnation is settled

Notice ***verse 19, whose end is destruction.*** This is their end. Paul is playing on words here. Earlier he used a form of this same word to refer to the *completion* – the *maturing* state of the believer whose end is *perfection* – in Christ.

Now, Paul uses that same word form to refer to the unbeliever whose end is destruction.

Other passages call it death or judgment. In fact, the word death – thanatos – doesn't mean to cease to exist, but to be separated – at death, the material physical part of you is separated from the immaterial spiritual part of you.^v

When you die, the shell of your physical body is separated from who you truly are; your body dies, but your soul is just beginning to see your eternal destination.

The Bible actually talks about two deaths; a physical death and a second death.

In fact, according to how scripture explains it; if you are only born once, physically, you are going to experience two deaths; a physical separation of body and soul when you die; and secondly, following the final judgment, a spiritual death – an eternal separation from God.

That’s exactly how the Apostle John speaks of it in **Revelation 20:14** where he writes, **and this is the second death – the lake of fire.**

The second death is not ceasing to exist; it is eternal separation from God.

But let me quickly add this; if you have been born twice – once physically and then born again by faith in Jesus Christ – if you have been born twice – you will only die once – physically.

You will not face the second death of eternal separation from God.

So let me summarize it this way: if you have been born only once, you die twice; but if you’ve been born twice, you only die once.

Unless the rapture occurs while we’re still alive – then you’ll not even die once – but like Enoch and Elijah, you’ll be given an immediate ride **upward to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17)**. And that’s another sermon . . . or two or three.

While I’m on this subject – and I get asked this question often – probably as much as any other question; what about that verse in **Matthew** where Jesus warned, **And do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who able to destroy both soul and body in Hell (Matthew 10:28)**.

That sounds like the bodies and souls of unbelievers eventually cease to exist – that God is going to destroy them both.

The word Jesus used for **destroy** is significant – it’s a word that means to *deliver up*. In fact, the Lord used that same word several times and every time He used it, it never meant to pass out of existence, but to be delivered up to misery.^{vi}

So Jesus is saying, “You’d better fear Him who is able to deliver up both soul and body in Hell.”

And this is the terrifying future existence of the unbeliever without Christ – described in the New Testament as:

- Eternal hopelessness
- Wasted lives
- Everlasting torment.
- Irredeemable lostness
- Never-ending darkness

- Eternal despair
- Banishment from the presence of God forever^{vii}

Paul was overwhelmed by the gravity of such an eternal, unremitting, never ending existence . . .

Dante described it well in his medieval poem, where he imagined written above the gates of Hell the words, “Abandon all hope, ye who enter here.”

You see, the question is not, “Does a person cease to exist?” The question is “Where will that person exist for eternity?” And that question brought tears streaming down the face of Paul.

Apart from Jesus Christ their condemnation is settled.

2. Secondly, their cravings are sensual

Paul writes further in **verse 19 . . . whose god is their appetite.**

The word **appetite** translates *koilia*, which refers to the colon, or the abdomen and in particular, the stomach. Paul uses it metaphorically to refer to the unrestrained, sensual, physical, forbidden desires.^{viii}

One author wrote that Paul is effectively saying that the unbeliever lives with no higher authority than the dictates of their bodily appetite . . . they worship their appetite.^{ix}

And would you notice that Paul doesn’t point out any specific appetite, does he? He doesn’t elaborate. He doesn’t refer specifically to fornicators or drug addicts or gluttons or gossips.

It really doesn’t matter what it is. The point Paul is making, J.A. Motyer writes, is that whatever the appetite is, it has lordship over them and they worship it.^x

And that’s true, isn’t it? Anything someone is pursuing in defiance of God *is* there god. But it can’t be that serious, can it?

What’s wrong with the desires someone acts upon? To quote a lyric from a generation ago – How can it be wrong when it feels so – what? – so right?

Can what a person desires really be a warning that they are not moving closer toward God, but only further away? According to Paul, the belly, the appetite, the sense of pleasure, can actually become idolatry . . . and idolatry ultimately brings judgment and death.

Steve Farrar wrote in his book, “Standing Tall” about a family who had taken shelter in the basement as a severe storm passed over their town.

The radio warned that a tornado had been spotted. When the storm had passed by, the family went upstairs and the father opened the front door to look at all the damage.

A downed power line in the street in front of their home was spraying a shower of sparks in the street. Before the father realized what was happening, his five year old daughter had run near the edge of the lawn, heading for that sparkling wire in the street.

“Laurie, stop!” he yelled.

Laurie just kept going.

“Laurie, stop right now!”

Laurie kept running for that enticing sparkler.

“Stop, Laurie” he screamed as he jumped off the porch

and ran to stop her.

But Laurie reached it first and grabbed it . . . and was instantly killed.”

It sparkled . . . it looked like fun . . . surely it would be something to experience . . . it doesn't look deadly . . .

The world is running after Judas; they race toward the sparkling gods of their own satisfaction. And the tragedy, learned too late, is that they have chosen unsatisfying sparkling gods.

And before they know it, they have wasted their lives. As Paul considers the self-destructing, empty lives of the unbelievers, tears cascade down his cheeks.

Their condemnation is settled

Their cravings are sensual

3. Thirdly, their commendations are shameful

Paul writes in *verse 19, whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame.*

In other words, Paul is saying that the world finds its greatest glory in that which is shameful.

You don't hear that language anymore do you?

That's shameful

- They flaunt their sexuality;
- They defy their God-given gender;
- They move from bed to bed;
- They abort their inconvenient babies.
- They race after ambition
- They openly pursue pleasure

- They run like Judas after his 30 pieces of silver;

Paul writes, they exalt – they glory in practices and habits and desires of which they should be ashamed, but are not.^{xi}

But it doesn't stop there.

Paul is actually saying that they arrive at the most extreme form of wickedness in that they are not only proud of their worst perversions, they applaud the same in other people.^{xii}

They glory in their shame. Isaiah the prophet recorded the same observation about his own generation when he wrote – *they call evil good and good evil; they substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter (Isaiah 5:20).*

It isn't evil, it's good;

It isn't darkness, it's light;

It isn't bitter, it's sweet.

Paul described this final step of utter defiance and unbelief as he wrote to the Roman church, that although the world intuitively *knows the ordinances of God, and that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them (Romans 1:32).*

And the world responds to the gospel, “This can't be out of bounds – look at how many people are doing it . . . this is commendable . . . c'mon . . . don't be on the wrong side of history.”

G.K. Chesterton famously wrote a century ago, fallacies do not cease to be fallacies because they become fashions.^{xiii}

- They are still fallacies . . .
- They are still tragic diversions from the truth . . .
- They are still unwholesome, self-destructing practices that heap one penalty upon another on poor lost people who are driven to justify their shame.

Their condemnation is settled

Their cravings are sensual

Their commendations are shameful

And with that, Paul delivers the fourth descriptive phrase;

4. Their captivations are short-sighted

Notice once more *verse 19 – they set their minds on earthly things.*

In other words, they are literally captivated by the things of earth.

- Materialism is their highest religion;
- Fashion is their sacred liturgy;
- Celebrities are their priestly guides;
- Possessions are their greatest reward;
- And earth is their heaven.

But don't pity them, they would quickly tell you – they prefer earth.

They are earth bound
They are earth dwellers
They are earth oriented
They are earth lovers
They are earth worshippers.^{xiv}

How tragically short sighted is that. That's like choosing 30 pieces of silver for the Savior. Listen, 30 – 50 – 70 – 100 years on earth with all the silver and gold and anything else you can get – and remember, the old commercial still rings in the unbelievers mind – you only go around once so get all you can – listen, getting all you can will not compensate for all of eternity.

And with tears streaming down his cheeks, Paul effectively informs the church in Philippi that for these unbelievers, earth will be the closest they will ever get to heaven.

Forget their resume . . . this will be their obituary:

- Their captivations were short-sighted
- Their commendations were shameful
- Their cravings were sensual
- Their condemnation is now, upon their death, settled.

But not yet . . . for you . . . it's not settled forever if you're alive and breathing at this very moment. There is still time.

Christ is your only hope . . . the gospel of faith in Christ alone is your only true salvation. Will you give up earth . . . for Him . . . before it is too late?

Charles Spurgeon preached 150 years ago, "As the Lord liveth, unbeliever, thou standest on a single plank over the mouth of hell, and that plank is rotten. Thou hangest over the pit by a solitary rope, and the strands of that rope are breaking."^{xv}

Now . . . before the plank breaks or the rope snaps – before your heart stops, call upon the name of the Lord, and thou shalt be saved . . . forever.

Don't run after Judas . . . run after Jesus!

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 2/21/2016 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ Adapted from Eugene Peterson, *Leadership*, Vol. 4, no. 1.

ⁱⁱ Adapted from James Montgomery Boice, *Philippians* (Baker Books, 2000), p. 209

ⁱⁱⁱ Adapted from J.A. Motyer, *The Message of Philippians* (IVP Academic, 1984), p. 189

^{iv} John MacArthur, *Philippians* (Moody Publishers, 2001), p. 257

^v W.E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary* (Thomas Nelson, 1997), p. 268

^{vi} Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon, quoted by Erwin Lutzer, *One Minute After You Die* (Moody Press, 1997), p. 103

^{vii} Adapted from Sam Gordon, *An Odyssey of Joy: The Message of Philippians* (Ambassador, 2004), p. 140

^{viii} MacArthur, p. 258

ix G. Walter Hansen, The Letter to the Philippians (Eerdmans, 2009), p. 266

x Motyer, p. 187

xi Motyer, p. 187

xii Adapted from MacArthur, p. 259

xiii —G.K. Chesterton, English writer (1874-1936)

xiv Adapted from Gordon, p. 141

xv Robert J. Morgan, Nelson's Complete Book of Illustrations & Quotes (Thomas Nelson, 2000), p. 428