

Judas: The Assassin

Selected Scripture

Introduction

Webster defined “betrayal” as, “the violation of a trust; to deal treacherously with another”. History is filled with stories of betrayal.

The Emperor Nero betrayed his mother by inviting her to a lavish banquet in her honor and, after warm embraces, putting her on a boat he had built especially for this special cruise – engineered to collapse at sea, and thus, drowning her. The boat failed to disintegrate completely, however, and she survived – only to be assassinated days later by soldiers sent by her son.

When we think of betrayals, we cannot help but think of the betrayal of entire nations.

The great wall of China was built thirty feet high, eighteen feet thick, and nearly two thousand miles long in order to protect the empire from invading barbarians from the north. Within the first hundred years of the wall’s existence, however, China was invaded three times due to the gatekeepers being bribed with money to betray their country. The invading armies marched through an open gate.

More recently, we learned of the appalling betrayal of this country by Robert Hanssen, an FBI agent. Hanssen sold secrets to the Russians for more than a million dollars. These secrets exposed and cost the lives of Americans. He admitted he did it for money.

Add to this the betrayal of religion and of religious leaders.

We recently read the news of priests betraying the trust of young children. And, we hear almost

daily reports of the religious betrayal of Islam toward its youth.

One sixteen year old recently stopped short of blowing himself up at a border. He later confided, “I did it because I wanted paradise with my own river of honey and seventy-two virgins.”

What betrayal! Can you imagine the moment of eternal recognition that you have been betrayed by your religion?

I came across this story of personal betrayal, carried by the news in Boston.

A woman announced to her friends that her cancer treatments had failed and out-of-state experimental treatments would not be covered by her insurance. Her friends, family, and co-workers rallied to her cause, raising forty thousand dollars for these special procedures. Only to find out that her cancer was a hoax; she had cut her own hair to appear to have had chemotherapy; she had spent all the money on her new car and vacation and other personal items.ⁱ

How despicable.

The American Heritage Dictionary defines betrayal, “to give aid or information to an enemy; to violate allegiance; to be false or disloyal”. I found it interesting that this standard dictionary chose as its primary illustration of betrayal, the act of Judas toward Jesus.ⁱⁱ

If you take all the stories of all the betrayers, all the traitors, all the conspirators, you will not come close to the shocking, self-centered, callous, demonically inspired betrayal of Jesus Christ by one

of His disciples. In this series on “The Men Who Missed Easter,” Judas Iscariot stands out as perhaps the greatest and most tragic illustration of betrayal. His very name, which has been shunned for generations, has come to represent betrayal; to represent, “dealing treacherously with another; giving aid to an enemy; violating allegiance”.

Scenes of a Betrayer

I want to take you to five or six scenes from the biblical account of Judas as we try to uncover how someone so close to the Savior could betray Him. And, more importantly, to uncover what this may reveal about humanity at large. And, most importantly, what this might reveal about us.

Scene I – Judas’ placement in the list of disciples (Matthew 10:2-4)

1. The first scene is in Matthew, chapter 10, verses 2 through 4, where the disciples are listed – a listing that is, like all the others, significant in its placement of the disciples – and Judas is always last.

In the last part of verse 4, Judas is identified as, . . . *Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Him.*

The key thing I want you to note is that Judas was one of the twelve. And I do not believe when Judas was chosen that he had any intention of betraying the Lord, although the Lord knew he would.

Judas’ background that led to betrayal

In hindsight, however, there were several things about Judas that created the background for his ultimate defection and treason. Let me give several things about Judas that would ultimately bear the fruit of betrayal.

Judas had an attraction to money

- First, Judas had an attraction to money.

In John, chapter 12, Mary comes and anoints the feet of Jesus with a costly perfume and the house was filled with the fragrance. John recorded in verses 4 and 5,

But Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples, who was intending to betray Him, said, “Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor people?”

How do you argue against that?

Just a few days before the crucifixion, the mask of Judas is slipping. He actually implies that Jesus is selfish. He is saying, in other words, “How can you accept this costly gift when poor people need the money?”

That sounds good, until John adds this commentary in the next verse,

Now he said this, not because he was concerned about the poor, but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box, he used to pilfer what was put into it.

In other words, by the end of three and a half years, Judas was more dishonest than ever. He was more deceitful; more callous than ever. Three and a half years had only hardened his heart. Judas was sitting under the greatest preacher who will ever teach the word of God, and his heart grew hard.

Can you imagine? The disciples had so little to begin with. They borrowed everything – from boats in which to sail in, to houses in which to meet in, to donkeys for the Lord to ride on. Yet, all the while, Judas is pilfering, John writes.

The Greek word for “pilfering” gives us our word “kleptomaniac”. Judas was constantly stealing from his comrades.

However, on the outside, Judas had been the logical choice to keep the money. The other men would have never guessed.

Part of our problem is that we picture Judas as some beady-eyed, wormy little man who was always off by himself. We think of him as friendless, isolated, moody, distant and aloof. He must have been the kind of man whose eyes were dark and filled with anger, right?

A little boy was in Sunday school and his teacher asked the class who betrayed Jesus. Kenny raised his hand and answered, “Judas, the scariest.”

Extra-biblical writings assume this has to be true, so over the centuries, fanciful apocryphal writings have created this image of Judas.

One apocryphal writing entitled, *The Story of Joseph of Arimathea*, taught that Judas was a member of Caiaphas’ family and had been sent to infiltrate the disciples.

Another more fanciful apocryphal book called, *The Acts of Pilate*, recorded that Judas went home after the betrayal and found his wife roasting a chicken. When he told her he was planning to kill himself because he was afraid Jesus would rise from

the dead and take vengeance on him, his wife responded sarcastically, “Jesus will no more rise from the dead than the chicken I am cooking will jump out of the fire and crow.”

And, at that instant, the chicken came back to life, jumped out of the fire, and crowed.

One writing from the twelfth century, called, *The Legendary Aura*, claimed that the parents of Judas knew there was something diabolical about him from a very early age, so they threw him into the sea, hoping to destroy him. He somehow managed to survive and grow to adulthood, and then married a beautiful older widow who turned out to be his mother.

These bizarre accounts are common in extra-biblical literature and are concocted in an attempt to demonstrate the vileness of Judas.ⁱⁱⁱ

Judas has to be vile, right? It has to be obvious, right? Yet the record of scripture does not bear this out.

Judas was chosen to administrate the disciples money because he was viewed as the most careful, capable man among them. In the upper room, Judas was not distant and aloof from Christ, but seated next to Him! He had gained so much respect that no disciple rebuked him after he rebuked Mary for her costly gift of ointment to the Lord.

One author wrote, “Instead of sly and wiry, maybe Judas was robust and jovial; rather than quiet, he could have very well been outgoing.”

In the upper room, a scene we will look at in a moment, when Jesus announced that one of them would betray Him, all eyes did not turn to Judas. No one said, “Aha, I knew it all the time . . . those beady little eyes!”

No! Every one of the men said, “Lord, am I the one?”

However, Judas did have this secret life – he had an attraction to money that drove him deeper and deeper into pious masquerading.

Judas had an affection for Jerusalem

- Secondly, Judas not only had an attraction to money, he had an affection for Jerusalem.

Judas, like all the other men and thousands of Jews living in and around Jerusalem, thrilled to hear Jesus talk about the coming kingdom.

Judas volunteered to leave everything to follow the One who claimed to be Messiah; the One whom the prophets announced would restore Jerusalem and the throne of David and the Jewish people.

Judas was passionate about Jerusalem. He was a man who loved his country and his people. He would follow Jesus for three and a half years, which means that Judas preached about the kingdom; taught about the Messiah.

Frankly, we would have selected him as an excellent candidate for deacon or elder. He would have been a popular Sunday school teacher because of his passion for the things of God. He was not the kind of person who slipped into church and sat on the back row . . . no offense back there.

When Jesus appeared with His message, Judas said, “Here’s somebody with divine power, capable of overthrowing Rome and setting up the people of God in the city of God once and for all.”

That leads me to the third and final clue about the character of Judas.

Judas had an avid hatred for Rome

- Thirdly, Judas had an avid hatred for Rome.

He is identified by the gospel writers as *Judas Iscariot*. Iscariot related to the Latin term “sicarius,” which was the designation of a radical Jewish group during the time of Christ.

The group was called the “Sicarii,” in honor of the “sica,” which was a dagger that they concealed in their robes and used to take the life of Romans and disloyal Jews alike. In chapter 21 of the book of Acts, they were called “Assassins”.

Josephus, a Jewish historian who lived during the first century, wrote about these men, saying,

There sprang up in Jerusalem a gang of robbers called Sicarii, who slew men in the daytime when they mingled with the populace at the festivals and hiding short daggers (sicas) in their garments, stabbed with them those that were their enemies.

The Sicarii were implacable in their hatred to Rome and those Jews who were suspected of leaning toward Rome.

This is the profile of not only Judas, but his father Simon, whom John designates by the same word “Iscariot,” or “sicarii,” in chapter 7, verse 71. Judas had grown up in the home of an Assassin – a

zealous Jew. He had been surrounded by blind patriotism all his life.

For now, however, for a few years, Judas had put away his dagger and decided to follow the One he thought would bring about the destruction of the Roman empire.

May I ask you a question? Why do you follow after Jesus? Just why do you attach yourself to Him?

Is He good for business? Does He make you feel better about yourself? Does He promise you something you want? Is it your agenda or His?

The answer will be given to you as soon as God's agenda becomes different from yours; as soon as you do not get what you want; as soon as trouble comes because you follow Him.

It has become apparent to Judas, by the end of Christ's ministry that a throne in Jerusalem is not awaiting him. Christ is not talking about destroying Rome, He is talking about dying.

Scene II – Judas' plot to betray Jesus (Mark 14:10-11)

2. Let us go to a second scene, separated from a third scene by only a few days in chapter 14 of Mark's gospel, where Judas' plot to betray Jesus is formed.

In verses 10 and 11, we read of a secret meeting.

Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went off to the chief priests, in order to betray Him to them. They were glad when they heard this, and promised to give him money. And he began seeking how to betray Him at an opportune time.

Scene III – Judas' upper room choice to betray Jesus (Matthew 26:20-25)

3. Then, the gospel of Matthew, chapter 26, verses 20 through 25, records the upper room scene which followed Judas's secret meeting with the religious leaders.

By the way, this upper room scene is one filled with unbelievable grace. Can you fathom it? Here is Jesus washing the feet of Judas; Jesus seating Judas near Him as an act of honor; Jesus giving Judas ample time to repent.

Then, Jesus makes the shocking announcement in verse 21b,

. . . Truly, truly, I say to you that one of you will betray Me.

This is an invitation for Judas to come clean. Satan has yet to personally possess him to carry out the deed. His feet have just been washed, and food is about to be personally handed to him by the Lord.

And he hears Jesus announce that He knows! In other words,

The one who will deal treacherously toward Me; the one who will aid the enemy; the traitor to My cause, is in this room.

Matthew records that all the disciples began to grieve; that is, to deeply grieve; to weep. And, they all began to say, in verse 22b,

. . . Surely not I, Lord?

Judas himself, said to Jesus, in verse 25,

. . . Surely it is not I, Rabbi? . . .

Judas merely imitates the shock and grief of the true disciples; true believers who immediately recoiled at the thought of betrayal. He simply mouthed the right words, feigning his loyalty, saying, "Rabbi – beloved Teacher – You are not talking about me, are You?"

Judas had become a consummate thief; a skilled pretender; an angry, disillusioned radical, and now a selfish man who will sell out his Teacher for having failed him. At least he will get thirty pieces of silver for his trouble!

Thirty pieces of silver was the first century payment for having accidentally killed someone's slave. It was as if to say, "It was an accident I ever followed Jesus. Killing Him will be no more of an issue to me than having accidentally killed somebody's slave."

How vile is that? How callous is that?

Scene IV – Judas' betrayal of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:49-50; John 18:4-6)

4. The fourth scene is a familiar one – it is in the Garden of Gethsemane, where Judas betrays Jesus, as recorded in Matthew, chapter 26, and John, chapter 18.

Judas leads several hundred armed soldiers, temple guards, and religious leaders, all of whom were cowards who needed the cover of night and the power of numbers, to do their evil deed, to the Garden of Gethsemane.

Verse 49 of Matthew, chapter 26, informs us that,

... *Judas went to Jesus ... and kissed Him.*

The verb tense indicates that Judas repeatedly kissed Jesus as he continued to feign affection.

I cannot imagine that scene – where a serpent empowered sinner kisses the cheek of sovereign God. I can only imagine the irony of that embrace reverberated throughout the universe.

The demons howled with glee, “We have Him.” The religious leaders took Him, and how they must have thought, “We will be rid of Him soon.” And, the disciples all flee in disillusionment and fear.

H. G. Wells, an unbelieving agnostic, once wrote his blasphemous perspective of God and the world He created. Wells wrote that the world is like a great stage production produced and managed by God.

As the curtain rises, the set is perfect, a treat to every eye. The characters are resplendent. Everything goes well until the leading man steps on the hem of the leading lady’s gown, causing her to trip over a chair, which knocks over a lamp, which pushes a table into a wall, which in turn, knocks over the scenery, which brings everything down on the heads of the actors.

Meanwhile, behind the scenes, God is running around, shouting orders, pulling strings, trying desperately to restore order from chaos. But, alas, He is unable to do so . . . poor God! Poor little, limited God.^{iv}

There is no poor God here . . . nor ever was there.

Matthew records in verse 50 that Jesus brushed Judas aside with the words,

... *Friend, do what you have come for.* . . .

This is not the normal Greek word for friend (“philos”), but a word that simply greets a stranger with respect. This could literally be rendered, “Sir, do what you have come for.” Or more woodenly, “Sir, get on with it.”

John’s gospel, in chapter 18, fills in this scene by telling us that Christ then stepped forward in the garden and said, in verse 4b,

... *Whom do you seek?* . . .

They did not need Judas to identify Him. He was not going to hide behind His disciples or behind some tree. He is not panicking. *He was prepared for this before the world was created.*

In verse 5a,

They answered Him, “Jesus the Nazarene.”

..

To which, in verse 5b,

He said to them “I am He.” . . .

Jesus responded by saying, “ego eimi,” or “I AM.”

This was the name of God that was revealed for the first time to Moses at the burning bush.

Moses asked, in Exodus, chapter 3, verse 13b,

... *Now they may say to me, “What is His [God’s] name?” What shall I say to them?*

In verse 14,

God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM”; and He said, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

In the *Septuagint*, those Greek words were “ego eimi”.

That is what Jesus said in this garden scene, “I AM WHO I AM.”

And the very next phrase in John, chapter 18, verse 6b, tells us,

... *they drew back and fell to the ground.*

Close to a thousand armed soldiers and leaders fell down as Jesus uttered His divine name. One breath of omnipotence slammed them flat on their backs!

There is no “poor God” here! There is just a willing Lamb who had come to earth to seek and save those who were lost.

Can you imagine Judas? Having been brushed aside with the truth that he had merely fulfilled prophecy; that he had been a pawn; that Christ was the great I AM, he was now lying stunned, on his back.

Scene V – Judas’ remorse (Matthew 27:3-5)

5. Let me take you to a fifth scene. It takes place before members of the Sanhedrin, which is the Supreme Court of Israel. Matthew, chapter 27, records Judas’ remorse.

Look at verse 3.

Then when Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that He had been condemned, he felt remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders,

Judas is experiencing remorse – not repentance.

“Metaneo” refers to a genuine sorrow of sin. That is not the word used in this verse. Instead, a word that refers to extreme guilt is used.

Judas simply knows that he has sinned.

Ladies and gentleman, no one goes to heaven because they know they have sinned. In fact, every man is condemned for his sin by his own conscience (Romans 2).

People go to heaven, not because they know they have sinned, but because they are saved. People go to heaven, not because they have become aware of their guilt and sin, but because they have gone to Jesus Christ alone for forgiveness of their sin.

Judas is overwhelmed by his sin, but refuses to repent.

He will return the money though. He says to the Sanhedrin, in verse 4a,

. . . I have sinned by betraying innocent blood. . . .

Then, in verse 4b,

. . . But they said, "What is that to us? See to that yourself!"

In other words, "What do we care about the innocence of Jesus or your guilt? See to that yourself."

Another way to word this is, "That's your problem!"

Had they been true leaders and shepherds they would have offered to lead Judas through the steps of repentance, for their own law from God declared in Deuteronomy, chapter 27, verse 25a,

Cursed is he who accepts a bribe to strike down an innocent person. . . .

Verse 5a of Matthew, chapter 27, tells us that,

. . . he [Judas] threw the pieces of silver into the temple sanctuary and departed; . . .

He threw it into the "naos," the inner holy place where only priests could go. It is as if Judas wanted to make sure that the priests would have to handle the blood money.

Scene VI – Judas' hanging of himself (Gospel accounts)

6. The final scene is the hillside where Judas hung himself.

Verse 5b of Matthew, chapter 27, tells us,

And he [Judas] went away and hanged himself.

By comparing gospel accounts, Judas evidently hung himself from a limb, but either the limb broke,

or, more likely, the rope broke after he had died. As a result, his body fell down the side of the hill and literally, tore open – he was disemboweled.

It is ironic to think that while Jesus hung on His tree, Judas was hanging from his. On one tree – the Savior; on the other tree – the unrepentant sinner, who had been deceived and empowered by the serpent.

Judas would miss Easter – the message of Christ's resurrection – and for him, it would forever be too late.

Observations from a Betrayer

Let me close by making several observations from the life of this betrayer.

1. First, it is possible to appear religious and yet, be far away from God.

Does this describe you, my friend? On the outside, everything appears right, but you and God alone know that on the inside, everything is wrong.

I invite you to pray and confess to Christ your sin and the waywardness of your heart.

2. Secondly, it is possible to associate with Christ without ever accepting Christ.

3. Thirdly, it is possible to hear the truth and see the truth exemplified in others without ever personally applying the truth to your own life.

I believe, beyond a shadow of any doubt, that in my audience this morning, there are men and women, young and old, who are on their way to judgment.

Tomorrow, you will continue your agenda . . . and God will be invoked only if it advances your agenda. Jesus is just another good luck charm. Christ will not:

- be included in your dating relationship;
- be allowed access to your financial records;
- be acknowledged in your career path unless you encounter obstacles;
- rule over your computer or your television;
- be your leading partner in business.

Jesus will be relegated to a dusty book somewhere in your house or under the front seat of your car.

You have heard the truth so often you can repeat it. You are, even now, associating with Christ and His people, yet you have never turned from sin and toward the Savior.

4. The final observation, my friend, is that it is possible to associate with the church without being a child of God.

In the past few weeks, we have, at this church, had a number of adults place their faith in Jesus Christ. Nearly every one of them had something in common – they had grown up in church. Most of them were well aware of the Bible, Jesus, sin, heaven . . . but they had never personally responded to the gospel as it related to them. They needed to pray, confessing their sin and receiving God’s gift of forgiveness and eternal life.

Conclusion

I will close with this true story. One man who had turned somewhat skeptical about the whole thing, had been attending our church for a few months. He had told his wife that he really did not believe any of this stuff, but he liked coming.

His wife told me, “He doesn’t believe in God, but he likes coming to hear you preach.”

I did not know how I should take that.

A few weeks ago, this man was sitting at a men’s gathering and admitted to one of the men near him that he was not a believer.

The man asked him, “Have you heard the gospel?”

He said, “Yea, sure I have, but it doesn’t matter to me.”

The other man then said, “Oh, well, you need to hear it again.”

“We are all sinners . . . ‘All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way . . . Yet it pleased the [Father] to bruise [His Son] . . . and [He] laid on Him the iniquity of us all. . . and with His stripes we are healed.’ Our faith is made valid and true by the resurrection of Jesus Christ who now offers salvation to anyone who believes.” (Isaiah 53:5a-6, 10a KJV)

By the time he finished, they were both in tears, and this man, my new brother in Christ, said, “I want Christ to become my personal Redeemer.”

And he prayed to receive Christ.

Perhaps you are like that man, right now. You come to church, but do not truly believe.

I want to add one more thing from these scenes as we close.

Matthew informs us, in chapter 27, verses 6 through 9, that all that was left of Judas’ blood money was a field – purchased with the thirty pieces of silver. The field was known to everyone as the Field of Blood. It was purchased by the priests as the place to bury strangers. The daily reminder of rejecting Christ would be a cemetery.

What a perfect picture of religion. In the final analysis, the best it can do is offer a free grave.

However, those who place their faith in Christ get more than a grave; they receive the risen Savior, the Lord of everlasting life.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 4/11/2004 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ “WCVB Television News Center 5 Evening News,” [Boston, MA] (Oct. 2000).

ⁱⁱ The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, fourth ed., (Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000).

ⁱⁱⁱ John MacArthur, Matthew (Moody Press, 1989), p. 182.

^{iv} R. Kent Hughes, John (Wheaton, IL, Crossway Books, 1999), p. 416.