

## **Eyewitness to Easter: Judas**

There are a lot of names we could associate with Judas Iscariot: nefarious, traitor, thief, turncoat, betrayer. We know he was one of the twelve disciples of Jesus, but most of us don't think of him as a leader, a servant, a gospel preacher and miracle worker, yet at one time it appears he was all of those things.

Unlike last Sunday's story of Peter, we don't know when or where Jesus called Judas to come and follow him. We do know whatever Judas was doing when Jesus called, like the others, he left it all to follow him. There was sacrifice involved and Judas said "yes" to Jesus, whatever the cost at that time. When Jesus said things that caused some to stop following him, Judas didn't walk away. For three years he was one of the 12 that accompanied Jesus everywhere, every event, every teaching, every miracle, every moment in the synagogue, every conversation with leaders, every confrontation with Pharisees, Judas was there, eyewitness to it all.

What do we know about Judas? While Peter and the others come from Galilee in the north, some believe Judas came from southern Judea, that his last name was name Iscariot, but that he was from a town named Kerioth. We don't know that for sure. We do know he was a preacher and a miracle worker. Luke records, **"Summoning the Twelve, he gave them power and authority over all the demons and to heal diseases. Then he sent them to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick."** Luke 9:1-2. Judas Iscariot was one of the twelve Jesus sent and that means he preached and proclaimed the kingdom of God. He healed the sick with the authority granted to him by Jesus. Just think, no doubt people turned their hearts to Christ and embraced the kingdom of God because of the early ministry of Judas.

Judas was a leader, gifted perhaps with an attention to detail, good with numbers. We assume this since John's gospel tells us the disciples made Judas the treasurer of their group. (My card: Messianic Ministries Inc. Judas Iscariot, Treas.) There must have been something about him that prompted Jesus and the disciples to trust him with the money. Unfortunately, not only was Judas good with numbers, John tell us, in hindsight, Judas was a thief. Not the guy you want handling the money after all. It turns out Judas was greedy, a lover of money.

When Mary anointed Jesus' feet with expensive perfume at Bethany John tells us, **"One of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected. 'Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages.' He did not**

**say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.” John 12:4-6**

It’s interesting the other gospel writers tell us the other disciples agreed with Judas and protested the extravagance of Mary’s actions. It suggests Judas and his opinions carried some weight and had influence over the other disciples. After the betrayal it seems they all wanted to distance themselves from Judas and their association with him. They speak of him like they hardly knew him. (“kind of a loner, kept to himself. I never really trusted him...”) Who could blame them? At the same time however, he must have been very clever since none of the disciples suspected Judas. Only Jesus knew what was in his heart. At the last supper, when Jesus said to Judas, “What you are about to do, do quickly”, referring to his betrayal, John tells us, **“No one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him. Since Judas had charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the Feast, or to give something to the poor.” John 13:27-29** Judas had a trusted position with the disciples.

That’s pretty much what we know about Judas, which brings us to the question, why did he betray Jesus? What drove him to such a despicable act?

**Driven by greed.** Was it simply that he was driven by greed? The synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke all tell us Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and plotted with them how he might betray Jesus into their hands. Matthew tells us Judas asked them, **“What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you? So they counted out for him thirty silver coins. From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over.” Matthew 26:15-16.** Judas was angry at Mary using a year’s salary to pour perfume on Jesus’ feet, but he sold him out for the equivalent of three or four months wages. It’s not much money for betraying a friend.

**Driven by a wrong view of Jesus.** Judas just didn’t get it. He wasn’t listening when Jesus spoke of the kingdom of heaven. His own priorities were wrong and it colored his view, his understanding and perception of Jesus. For Judas, everything was about this life, material things, political things, power and position rather than eternal things, things of the Spirit.

Peter declared Jesus to be the Holy One of God, other disciples called him Master, Lord, but not Judas. When Jesus said “one of you will betray me” Judas responded, **“Surely not I, Rabbi?” Matthew 26:25.** Jesus said, “Yes it is you.” In the Garden of Gethsemane as Judas betrays Jesus to the chief priests, he said, **“Greetings, Rabbi!”** and kissed him.” It was always

rabbi, never Lord. It's the problem with many today, they have a wrong view of Jesus. They make him teacher, but never Lord. **A wrong view of Jesus leads to wrong choices and actions.**

Judas was an opportunist. He believed Jesus was setting up an earthly kingdom. I believe he saw a chance to be treasurer in the new kingdom. He had a plan for advancement if he could just get Jesus to step up, leverage his popularity and accept his place as the Messiah and king. In John 6 after Jesus fed the five thousand, people began to say, **“Surely this is the prophet who is to come into the world.”** The one like Moses. Moses gave us manna in the wilderness and Jesus has given us bread and fish.” John writes, **“Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.” John 6:15.** Judas was thinking, “OK Jesus, here's your opportunity (and mine). Now's the time. The people are ready to make you king.” Instead of encouraging the crowd, Jesus slips away. Instead of increasing the crowd, Jesus says some difficult things in John 6 and actually thins the crowd. People are leaving. It meant less money in the bag for Judas to steal and less people for an army, for an insurrection. Judas had a plan for Jesus and Jesus wasn't following his plan! Daniel Darling wrote, “Jesus was refusing the kingdom Judas wanted for him.” It's the danger of a wrong view of Jesus. We are always focused on the wrong kingdom. Don't you hate it when you can't get Jesus to do it your way, to see it your way, to follow your plans?

With a wrong view of Jesus and driven by wrong priorities, some think Judas agreed to betray Jesus in an attempt to force his hand. He had to act before the opportunity was lost. He believed Jesus with his miracles and his popularity could lead an insurrection, oust the Romans and liberate the Holy Land. He was convinced by his betrayal he could back Jesus into a corner and force him to accept his place as Israel's new Messiah. He couldn't imagine Jesus would choose to die rather than fight, or that this was all part of something greater, part of God's redemption plan. “If I betray him, he'll rally the people, work a miracle, defeat Rome and instead of being the bad guy in the story, I'll be the hero that forced Jesus to do the right thing, take his place as king, and he'll reward me and make me treasurer in his new kingdom.”

Judas' value system was upside down. His priorities were wrong. It was about money and power, position and politics. Quoting again from Daniel Darling, “[Judas] became an enemy of the cross because he saw Jesus more as a vessel for his own ambitions than a Savior for his soul.” Judas used Jesus (to get what he wanted) rather than served Jesus. He wanted to make Jesus into what he wanted him to be rather than take him as he is, take him as Savior and Lord.

We can learn from Judas' mistakes. It's time to stop trying to make Jesus into what we want him to be. Accept him for who he is, as difficult as that may be at times. Read the Scripture and take him as he is. Stop trying to make Jesus in your image and instead, allow him to make you into the person he has designed and destined you to be. Stop using Jesus as a means to an end like Judas. It won't end well. Let him be the Lord of your life. Don't use him, love him, serve him, surrender to him. Judas was driven by greed, a wrong view of Jesus and ultimately...

**Judas was driven by Satan.** When it gets right down to it, the Scripture gives this explanation. **“Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve. And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus.” Luke 22:3-4** Luke acknowledges that Satan is behind the whole plan. John describes the setting at the Last Supper. Jesus said one of you will betray me. The disciples ask which of them could possibly do it. John asks Jesus which one and Jesus tells him, “the one to whom I give this piece of bread.” Jesus handed the bread then to Judas and John says, **“As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him.” John 13:27.** The rest of the disciples still didn't know it was Judas. Things looked and seemed normal, but Judas had opened his heart, his mind, his life to wrong, to demonic influence. It wasn't just in that moment, although at that moment Satan may have filled his heart with a resoluteness, that from then on there was no turning back for Judas. But I think this was a process, a series of choices as he allowed himself to be driven by greed, stealing and lying, he fell deeper and deeper into sin and opened himself to greater influence from the enemy.

Let me ask you, what are the influences in your life today? To what influences are you opening your heart and your mind? Music, media, peers, money, greed, what influences your choices? Jesus told Judas and the disciples, “where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” Judas' treasure was in money and power and that's where his heart was also. With his heart in the wrong place, he convinced himself that betraying Jesus was the right thing, the best thing. Right becomes wrong and wrong becomes right. Don't let it happen. Guard your mind and your heart from evil influence. Don't open yourself to darkness.

Judas set his heart on this course of betrayal and nothing would stop him. Not even love. Think about this: Jesus washed Judas' feet that night along with the other disciples. Imagine Jesus kneeling before him, washing his feet, knowing in a few hours Judas would betray him. It

says much about Jesus. Even though Jesus says it would be better for Judas if he had never been born (Mt. 26:24), he still extends love to Judas. Jesus is not willing that any should perish, not even Judas. “Here, take and eat, this bread is my body, given for you. Drink from the cup, the new covenant in my blood.” How could Judas eat and drink, knowing he was preparing to betray Jesus? How could he do it? But then again, I’ve been guilty of betrayal, taking communion, thankful for his sacrifice but then within hours betraying Jesus by my words, my actions, my thoughts. God deliver us from sin and betrayal. Thank God for forgiveness and mercy. Jesus extends mercy to Judas, but Satan filled his heart, sin and greed blinded his eyes, drive for position and power corrupted his conscience and distorted his values. Judas is with Jesus at the Last Supper but within a couple of hours Jesus would say, “Here comes my betrayer” as Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss.

Taken by the guards in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus is led away to the house of the Chief Priest where he is interrogated and the Sanhedrin, the elders of the people, made the decision to condemn Jesus to death and hand him over to the Roman governor Pilate. The bible tells us, **“When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders. ‘I have sinned,’ he said, ‘for I have betrayed innocent blood.’ ‘What is that to us?’ they replied. ‘That’s your responsibility.’ So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself.” Matthew 27:3-5**

“When he saw that he was condemned”. It’s one of the reasons I think Judas was trying to force Jesus’ hand, to force him to take action. Whatever Judas’ motive, God had a different plan and purpose. Someone said, “Judas was part of Satan’s plan, but God’s counterplan.” (Darling). Judas did the work of Satan, but Jesus said, “No one takes my life from me, but I am freely laying it down.”

I think the saddest part of Judas’ wrong view of Jesus is this: **Judas underestimated Jesus’ capacity to love and forgive.** Filled with remorse, Judas ran to the chief priests and elders but Judas should have run to Jesus. Judas gave up hope. He figured he had gone too far this time. “There is no way Jesus could forgive me, not now.” But Peter had failed and denied the Lord, in its’ own way a type of betrayal, and Jesus had forgiven him. “Judas, redemption and restoration is possible if you’ll call on the Lord.” Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Judas’ story didn’t have to end this way with despair, regret, suicide. Neither does yours!

Don't underestimate the love of Jesus and his willingness to forgive! I don't care what you've done or failed to do, Jesus will forgive if you will repent and turn to him. Judas could have come home to Jesus and found forgiveness and hope and eternal life. He passed up his chance, but you don't have to. There is hope for you! You don't have to suffer the same fate as Judas. You can turn to Jesus today. If you've felt like giving up, if you've felt overwhelmed by sin and your past, if you've felt like ending it all, listen to me, there is hope in Jesus. We've all betrayed Jesus one way or another, we've all sinned and missed the mark but the one we betrayed took our place and died for us so we could have eternal life. "If we confess our sins, Jesus is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9. Where there is life, there is hope the bible says. Today is your day, to step away from darkness and into the light of his forgiveness, his mercy, his grace.

Maybe your priorities have been wrong, maybe you've had a wrong view of Jesus, maybe you've opened yourself to wrong influences that you know aren't pleasing to the Lord, aren't healthy or helpful. Whatever your situation, your circumstances, however desperate, there is life and hope for you in Jesus! I invite you to turn to Jesus today.