

Judas – How to Condemn Yourself

The character of Judas is one of the most tragic in all history, if not the most tragic. In fact, the name Judas has entered our vocabulary to mean betrayal. For example, in agriculture, some farmers use what is called Judas goat. The Judas goat is a goat that is trained to mingle with the other animals, but then leads them to a slaughterhouse, where the Judas goat is spared, of course, and used again.

When Dante wrote his epic poem, *Inferno*, he pictured hell as being a place with nine circles or rings, each one holding sinners guilty of more and more severe sins. The deepest layer of Hell in Dante's *Inferno* is reserved for treachery, and there in the ninth circle of Hell, is Judas for an eternity. That might be fiction, but it does report a reality: betrayal and treachery is one of the worst acts we can perform. And when the betrayal is of none other than the Son of God, it is quite literally, the worst betrayal in history.

Studying Judas is important for all of us, because any one of us could end up like Judas. After all, Judas joined the disciples of Jesus, no doubt never dreamt that he would come to hate Jesus and betray Him. That certainly isn't how he started. He must have begun with the enthusiasm of being part of Messiah's inner ring, and seeing the miracles, the healings, the crowds. He likely had some background in finance, or business, or administration, because he was entrusted with administering the finances of the whole ministry of Jesus. And many people today begin their religious journey with similar enthusiasm. There are crowds of people, there's zeal, slick music and presentations, supposed miracles. But Judas had mistaken his zeal for these externals for heart belief, for deep, inner repentant trust in Messiah Jesus.

But as Alfred Edersheim puts it, “But, step by step, had come the disappointments. John [the Baptist] was beheaded, and not avenged; on the contrary, Jesus withdrew Himself.” Jesus seemingly kept withdrawing, from enemies and even from success, almost like running away – and even when Israel was about to make Him King! He refused to show Himself openly at Jerusalem, or to answer the taunts of his own brothers, or the challenges of the Pharisees! We picture the growing frustration in Judas. And then, preaching a message of shame, disaster, and death. For Judas, this was the disappointment of all those hopes and expectations which had drawn him to follow Jesus in the first place.

We don't know exactly when, but at some point, the inner emptiness crumbled under the outward disappointments. And once Judas saw that Jesus was determined to go to Jerusalem and embrace crucifixion, he reasoned that he might as well get some money out of the deal before the whole thing blew up.

Jesus compared the faith of someone like Judas, and of many people to that of a plant that takes root in shallow soil. A thin layer of topsoil brings an initial, explosive growth. But underneath that topsoil is a bedrock of impenetrable limestone: a hard, unyielding, selfish heart. Jesus said once the heat of trials, difficulties, and disappointments come, the lack of genuine root cannot survive and the plant is scorched away.

The apostle John was an eyewitness of this tragic story of a man that was so close, and yet so far, a man blessed with more light than most will ever see, and yet who chose to walk into darkness. John mentioned Judas more times in his Gospel than any of the other three Gospels. Clearly, the life of Judas had powerfully affected him.

John gives us a close-up of the moment when Judas tossed away his own lifeline. Far from being a robot who was pre-programmed to act out this apostasy, Judas made active choices to condemn himself. He bit the hand that was extended to help him. Judas is a study in how to condemn yourself, how to despise mercy, how to love death.

Here in the midst of a meal, we'll see the Lord extend grace, and second chances to a man who is standing at the edge of the cliff into the abyss. John gives us three moments of this grace extended, a public announcement, a private revealing, and a personal gesture.

I. The Public Announcement of a Betrayer

¹⁸ "I do not speak concerning all of you. I know whom I have chosen; but that the Scripture may be fulfilled, '*He who eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me.*' ¹⁹ Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am *He*. ²⁰ Most assuredly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me." (John 13:18–20)

Jesus has just washed the disciples' feet, and when Peter objected, Jesus said, I have to wash you for you to be part of me. Peter said, then wash all of me! Jesus then switches from literal water to spiritual cleansing. Jesus said that a true believer is clean from his sins, but needs only the frequent foot-washing of confession before God. This state of being clean from their sins was not true of all of them.

So Jesus announces: "I do not speak concerning all of you". One of the twelve was not clean. Judas. Judas was not a believer who could do with daily confession. He had yet to receive the spiritual bath which is salvation. He was never saved.

But this is no accident or oversight. Jesus says, I know whom I have chosen. Jesus chose Judas and knew what He was doing when He did it.

But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹ Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." ⁷⁰ Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?" ⁷¹ He spoke of Judas Iscariot, *the son* of Simon, for it was he who would betray Him, being one of the twelve. (John 6:68–71)

Jesus chose Judas, but that does not mean the man was saved. Not all election is to salvation. God chooses Israel for service, without choosing all to salvation. God chooses certain political leaders to do His bidding: Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, Pontius Pilate – they weren't all converted. So the choosing to the office of apostleship was not the same as being chosen for salvation.

But Jesus says that the choice of Judas fulfils prophetic Scripture. He quotes Psalm 41:9, a psalm in which David laments and says, "Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, Who ate my bread, Has lifted up *his* heel against me." (Psalm 41:9) Lifting up the heel in Eastern culture was like shaking the dust off your feet, showing the bottom of your feet in contempt. It meant to turn against, to repudiate your relationship.

In fact, in verse 19, Jesus says that He is making this public announcement in advance, so that when it is fulfilled, when the unsaved apostle among them reveals himself, they may believe that Jesus is the I AM. Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am *He*.

Think of how a betrayal could shake the faith of the disciples, tempting them to question Jesus and doubting, wonder, "Was Jesus caught unawares? Was Jesus tricked? Was Jesus deceived by one of His own?"

By making this public announcement, instead their faith will be grown. They will see, Jesus was no victim, He told us this in advance, and told us this was part of the prophesied plan of Messiah. He truly is the I AM; He saw the future in advance and told us. And that's the link to verse 20. Even after the betrayal, His identity will remain the same, and the mission will remain the same. Jesus again reminds them of His identity as the Sent One from the Father; to receive the Son is to receive the Father. And logically, if Jesus sends these disciples out, then to receive them is to receive the

message of Jesus.

Jesus now draws all these truths together to make the explicit public announcement. 1) Not all of you are saved. 2) But I knew that in advance when I chose you. 3) This situation was predicted in Scripture. 4) I'm telling you in advance so your faith is not shaken and you know I was in control of this situation. 5) And the mission of sending you will go on just as before after this.

²¹ When Jesus had said these things, He was troubled in spirit, and testified and said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me." ²² Then the disciples looked at one another, perplexed about whom He spoke.

He doesn't say it lightly, casually, or flippantly. Jesus is not caustic, sarcastic, or speaking with wounded self-pity. He is not jaded, cynical, or disgusted. He was troubled in spirit. This is the same word used for how Jesus felt at the tomb of Lazarus. Distressed, grieved, sorrowful and offended. He tells them that one of the twelve, one of the ones whose feet He has just washed, one of the ones who has been personally mentored, trained, taught for three years, is going to betray Jesus, and his fellow apostles. He has invested in Judas, and done everything to draw him to salvation.

Well, the disciples now look at each other, utterly bewildered that there could be a traitor in the group. Judas had done such a good job of hiding his true nature, that the other eleven men did not even suspect him. The other Gospels tell us that they began saying to Jesus "Is it I? And even Judas, playing the part to the end, according to Matthew 26:25, said to Jesus, "Surely it is not I, Rabbi?" Of course, this is a ruse. He already has thirty pieces of silver in his pocket. It was before this meal, right after Mary anointed Jesus' feet with perfume, that Judas sought out the Sanhedrin, offered to betray Jesus, took the money, and began plotting for a time and place to betray Jesus.

Judas thinks he is going to trick Jesus, but Jesus is one step ahead of Judas, announcing this in advance.

Now this seems perplexing to us. Jesus is saying that Judas is acting out a part predicted and prophesied by Scripture. The words in verse 18, may be fulfilled can mean "must be fulfilled" or "should be fulfilled" or "in order that they be fulfilled", but they all still come to the same thing: the betrayal of Messiah was predicted centuries before, and because God knows the end from the beginning, what He knows about the future is necessarily true: it will take place. God cannot see a false future, a future that doesn't happen. So if God declares Messiah is going to be betrayed, then it is determined in advance that this will happen. So then is Judas a helpless pawn in the chess-match of God's determined plan? No, listen to the words of Jesus given in Luke: ²² And truly the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!" (Luke 22:22)

God's plan is going to happen, but the man who chooses to play the part of the betrayer – woe to Him. A woe is similar to a curse: it means that this man has chosen a path that Scripture condemns. It means that Judas was truly a free agent, free to choose. He had the power of contrary choice; he did not have to sin. From the point of view of God's sovereignty, the future is set. From the point of view of humans in time, what is before us is choices, paths, ways that Scripture blesses or condemns, warns against or encourages. C. S. Lewis said, "For you will certainly carry out God's purpose, however you act, but it makes a difference to you whether you serve like Judas or like John."

Jesus has made a public announcement of a betrayer without identifying him. But now Jesus is going to privately reveal the betrayer to one of the disciples.

II. The Private Revealing of the Betrayer

²³ Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved. ²⁴ Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask who it was of whom He spoke. ²⁵ Then, leaning back on Jesus' breast, he said to Him, "Lord, who is it?" ²⁶ Jesus answered, "It is he to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it."

Now to imagine this scene, picture not one table but about three or four tables, laid out like a square or a square horseshoe, or one table, with people arranged around it in that shape. The tables are only about 30 centimetres off the ground. Now picture some pillows and comfortable materials to lie on, and see about three or four men at each of those tables, each lying on his left side, perpendicular to the table, feet away, and using his right hand to eat.

At a meal like this, the chief couch would be where the host reclined, in the middle, and the person to his right would be in a place of honour. But surprisingly, the place of chief honour was the one who was on the left of the host. Jesus is at that table, and the apostle John, the writer of this Gospel is to the right of Jesus. So, if John leaned back, he would be placing himself right under Jesus' chin, leaning on His chest.

This is the first time he calls himself the disciple Jesus loved, and it is his humble title to refer to himself. He refers to himself that way six times in this Gospel. It's a kind of modesty as an author. He deflects attention off himself and back to Jesus even when referring to himself. Who am I? A disciple Jesus loved. It is John's way of saying, when you were around Jesus as His disciple, the first and primary thing you knew was that Jesus loved you.

Probably, Peter is reclining at the table opposite the table Jesus and John are at. So Peter probably does something with his eyes or face that silently communicated to John, "Ask Him! Find out who it is!"

So John kind of rolls back, and no doubt whispers, "Lord, who is it?" It's really quite a bold question, isn't it? Jesus has not revealed the name of the betrayer publicly, but John is asking Jesus to give him a name. It can only be that John is banking on being part of the inner three: Peter, James and John, that Jesus will tell him what he has not told the others.

But that raises the question, why didn't Jesus reveal Judas to the group? Why didn't He expose him? The answer has to be that Jesus was still giving Judas a last chance to repent. By not naming him, the betrayer still has the chance to change course, not go through with it, and retain his standing and reputation among the others. It would be like someone saying to a classroom of children: someone here took money out of my bag. I am going to leave the room and when I come back, I want to see it back. You have a chance to repent without exposure.

Jesus is willing to tell John, probably because John has the subtlety to see that Jesus does not want the man exposed before the time. So instead of whispering a name, which could have been overheard, he whispers that it will be the disciple that he gives the dipped bread to. Only one person in the room will know who the betrayer is. But John can tell by the way Jesus is doing this that Jesus does not mean to expose the man, have the other eleven jump on him. John can tell that Jesus is still seeking to persuade the man, offer friendship and a way back.

And the final way that Jesus does that is with a personal gesture.

III. The Personal Gesture to the Betrayer

And having dipped the bread, He gave *it* to Judas Iscariot, *the son of Simon*.

The dipping of the bread was likely taking pieces of unleavened bread, adding to it some of the roasted lamb and bitter herbs, and giving it to a person. It could also have been dipping the unleavened bread into the charoset sauce, a mixture of dates, raisins and vinegar. At a meal like this, the host of the meal would do this, dip something particularly tasty and pass it to a guest as a mark of honour and friendship.

Now given they are either reclining around three or four small tables, or reclining in a semi-square around one table, how would Jesus have been able to reach Judas to give him the bread? The answer is, because Judas was almost certainly reclining next to Jesus, on His left. And though it is often thought the the person on the right was in the place of honour, at a meal like this, the person who reclined to the left of the host was also in a place of high honour, for it would then be the host who would be leaning back onto the bosom of that person.

Jesus has seated Judas at the place of honour at the table. This comes shortly after a dispute broke out among them about who will be greatest in the kingdom of heaven, according to Luke 22. So here is Judas, seated as the guest of honour, and now receiving from Jesus the mark of friendship, honour and trust.

What is all this? It is Jesus extending a hand of grace to Judas. Judas still has time to turn back, to see the loving, kind hand of Jesus. Even now, knowing the treachery in Judas' heart, Jesus is offering him a second chance, a way back. Judas knows that Jesus now knows, and he must make a choice: turn back, or go forward.

²⁷ Now after the piece of bread, Satan entered him.

Now the text says that after the piece of bread, Satan entered Judas. Judas had one more chance to soften his heart to Jesus and change course. But evidently, he received the bread with all the cynicism and deceptiveness of a traitor. He knew what Jesus meant by it – friendship – and scornfully took it, ate it, and doubled-down on his determination to reject Jesus. And it seems that moment of final refusal of the light, final rejection of love and truth was as if one door closed and another opened. The door of his affections closed to Christ, and another opened wide to Satan.

This probably means that Satan possessed Judas, the way demons possess people. And since Satan is not omnipresent, since he is restricted to places and times, it is clear that Judas is a very high priority target. Satan doesn't possess everyone he can.

It seems that Satan's desire was to get Jesus on the cross, to see Jesus destroyed, and Judas was the means to do that. Evidently, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:8 that not one of the rulers of this age knew the hidden wisdom of God in the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. Satan did not see that the bruising of Messiah's heel would actually crush his head. But had Satan not entered Judas, perhaps Judas would not have had the strength of evil will to go through with the plan.

Here is now a man who has abandoned himself to rejection, and into the vacuum he has created by removing God has come rushing in something terrifying. So all that is left is for Jesus to tell Judas to hasten. Get it over with. Don't prolong this pain.

Then Jesus said to him, "What you do, do quickly." ²⁸ But no one at the table knew for what reason He said

this to him. ²⁹ For some thought, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus had said to him, “Buy *those things* we need for the feast,” or that he should give something to the poor.

Even to this very moment, Judas is not suspected by any in the group. Of course, John now knows, but even John doesn't understand what Jesus is saying. So complete was Judas' deception that all of them thought Judas was still a faithful disciple, and all Jesus was telling him to do was to go and quickly buy food for the the Feast of Unleavened bread, or quickly go and give money to the poor.

But notice how John both actually and poetically describes what Judas did next.

Having received the piece of bread, he then went out immediately. And it was night. (John 13:18–30)

Judas takes the food, cynically eats it, and decides, yes, let's get this over with. He leaves immediately. John tells us it was now night time, and while that is certainly what time of day it was, it seems John is also telling us what this man had just stepped into morally and spiritually. Darkness. From the warm glow of a Passover meal, with the comforts of friends and food and fellowship, there at the very place of honour next to Jesus, Judas has left. He has exited. He has turned his back and walked out, into the night. Where he now goes it is the darkness of apostasy, the darkness of being used by Satan, the darkest darkness of all, which is light seen and light rejected.

I wonder if Peter didn't partly have Judas in mind when he warned about apostates and false teachers.

²⁰ For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. ²¹ For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known *it*, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. ²² But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: “*A dog returns to his own vomit,*” and, “*a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire.*” (2 Peter 2:20–22)

John himself said, “¹⁹ They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but *they went out* that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us. (1 John 2:19)

Could Judas have avoided his fate? It is futile to ask hypothetical questions of the past. But we can, looking back, take away three warnings from Judas' life.

1) He should have understood what Jesus meant by counting the cost. Jesus often preached about giving up things, forsaking things, leaving things behind for His sake. He spoke about being rejected, persecuted, even harmed for his sake. Maybe Judas shrugged these things off, and thought they were for other people. But every Christians needs to know that some kind of suffering is appointed for you. There is no hack, no exemption, no priority boarding and skip the queue here. Everyone who names the name of Christ is going to face some deprivation, some loss, some pain. And I don't mean that the line was long at Starbucks and he got your order wrong. I mean that to live for Christ you will be faced with choices: sometimes Christ and family, sometimes Christ and making money, sometimes Christ and being popular. Judas had gotten the idea that this cost was temporary, or for other people.

2) He should have dealt with the dissatisfaction in his heart. Judas steadily grew in dissatisfaction, unhappiness, and disappointment with Christ and with following Christ. But he masked it, masked it so well that none of his fellow apostles detected the least bit of defection. That tells me Judas was

a bubbling cauldron of cynicism, criticism, unthankfulness. Week by week, the teachings of Christ began to grate on him, instead of delight him. The company of the disciples made him feel guilty, not edified. His studied expressions of piety and his perfected smile hid what was within: profound spiritual emptiness and discontent. He did not love God's Word, but was too much a part of the ministry to admit it. At some point, He should have broken down and spoken to Jesus, or at least one of the others and said, "I am hollow inside. I don't feel or love any of this stuff. I need to be saved! I know I'm numbered as one, but I want the reality, not just the appearance."

3) He should have responded to the invitations Christ gave. As Jesus invited people and pleased with people, the hand was extended to Judas too. But Judas was too proud to admit that, even as one of the twelve, perhaps he needed to come and be saved. He was too proud to admit that as advanced as he was outwardly, he actually needed to begin. These invitations continued to this very last minute. Imagine him taking that sop, and beginning to weep bitterly like Peter. Imagine him asking Jesus for forgiveness and help and a new start. But Judas excommunicated himself. Judas condemned himself.

Some examples in Scripture are great encouragements. Some examples are great warnings. Let him that thinks he stands, look out lest he fall, the Bible says. There is a Judas in every one of us. So to prevent your going out into the night, have you counted the cost? Have you accepted following Jesus is worth it, of surpassing worth, but it is not cheap, easy, comfortable? Have you accepted that the ride will be bumpy and through much tribulation we must enter the kingdom of God. Have you, and are you dealing with discontent in your heart? Unhappiness with the Word, with the church, with its people is like an infection that does not get better without treatment. Don't ignore the pain of spiritual emptiness. Talk to someone. Approach someone. And then, on that note, are you too proud to approach someone? Are you convinced that you have an image to uphold as someone already saved, already baptised, already in a position. Forget all that, if you need to be truly saved. I have heard of more that one pastor, who came to the realisation that he was not saved, came to Christ, and admitted as much to his congregation. Rather humiliation now than condemnation later.

Judas says to you and me, don't be like me. Grace is offered. Don't condemn yourself.