

Unlikely Candidates: God Knows the Heart

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Date: 06 November 2022

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- [0 : 0 0] Good morning and welcome here for this Sunday, November 6th. Sherwin said to me, I guess it's winter. Isn't that crazy how it just, it always just happens so fast.
- Halloween night, I gave the last bit of candy to a trick-or-treater and then I woke up the next morning and needed my snow shovel. Welcome to Alberta, right?
- So my name is Kent Dixon. I'm the lead pastor here. And whether you're with us this morning in person, welcome here this morning. Or whether you're listening on the phone line or our podcast or on the church website in the days ahead, welcome here in however you're connecting with us.
- And for those who are here right now, this morning, congratulations. Because you remember Daylight Saving Time. And Shelly remembered it after she forgot it.
- So she's been here twice. He's twice as holy as the rest of us. Len was practicing this morning and Shelly came and said, no church? And he said, check your phone.
- [1 : 0 5] Phones are fun. So a quick pastoral announcement. Michelle and I will be away this week at the Banff Pastor and Spouses Retreat. And we're already actually transporting, picking up another pastor and his wife who are flying from Yellowknife.
- And then we're picking up somebody else from BC in Calgary. So it's pretty crazy. But so we're going to be attending sessions and connecting with other people who are in ministry, ministry colleagues and their spouses.
- And this year is particularly a huge blessing for our church because there is no cost to us as a congregation for us to attend this year. Dennis Stone, our regional minister, reached out to me in the summer and said, in honor of your ordination, he said, we'd like to send you guys this year so there's no cost to Bramor if you want to accept.
- And I said, are you crazy? I said, we're honored, humbled. So in past years, past Sundays, I've been away after the Sunday, after the retreat.
- But I've been away a lot and I don't want to be away anymore. So I will be here next Sunday. And we're going to recognize, as Len touched on, Solidarity Sunday. And it's a time when we reflect on the work of our missionary organization, Canadian Baptist Ministries, around the world.
- [2 : 2 8] So CBM has created this really great video service. So it's all incorporated in video. It features many participants.
- It includes worship singing and prayers and readings and a sermon from people all throughout the missions organizations of our denomination. So we'll be experiencing that together next Sunday.
- And I will be here with you to enjoy that. Our Advent Sermon Series this year is called Ugly Christmas Sweater. And we'll be starting that on Sunday, November 27th.
- I've wanted to do this series for several years now, believe it or not. But COVID obviously threw a wrench into that. So I'm looking forward to doing this. So I encourage everyone to wear an ugly Christmas sweater.

Iris has got it. I'm going to, but I want everyone to do it. So wear an ugly Christmas sweater on November 27th, December 4th, 11th, and 18th.

[3 : 32] Those are the four Sundays of our series. Bring friends and family with you to this series. It's going to be fun. But we're also going to explore some important topics in this Advent Series together leading up to Christmas.

We're going to look at things like ugly words, ugly motives, ugly thoughts, all through this lens of ugly Christmas sweaters.

So I think it'll be fun. This morning we're continuing in our sermon series called Unlikely Candidates. And over the course of this series, we've been taking a closer look at specific people from the Bible.

Some familiar and others not as much. And we've been considering how God may have chosen them. How he worked in and through them. And what we can learn from their stories.

And my hope is that this has been an enlightening and encouraging journey for us. We have one more in this series that will be Sunday after next. So I want to be up front with you this morning.

[4 : 36] Our unlikely candidate that we're going to be looking at today is generally considered to be more of a villain than a hero. Someone who seems to have worked against God's purposes more than for them.

But I also want to recognize that we are vulnerable to all the same things that brought about this person's downfall. And that's why we're looking at the story.

This person's name has even become synonymous with the idea of betrayal or stabbing other people in the back. Any guesses? Some interesting guesses.

Let's begin by reading Luke 6, verses 12 to 16. So if you have your Bible with you, you can also grab one from the pew in front of you. I'll give you a minute. Luke, it's at the beginning of the New Testament-ish.

Chapter 6, verses 12 to 16. So you can open your Bible with me or grab one of those Bibles. And I'll read it as well. So you can follow along or listen. One of those days, Jesus went out to the mountainside to pray and spent the night praying to God.

[5 : 50] When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose 12 of them, whom he also designated apostles. Simon, who he named Peter, his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip Bartholomew, Matthew Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon, who was called the Zealot, Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot.

As we read, who became a traitor. So there are similar lists of the disciples in the accounts of Matthew 10 and Mark 6 as well.

But none of them really give us a ton of detail about this man. So who was Judas? At some point, I want to do a series on the apostles and look at them in detail.

So I will explore some more of him then. But who was he? Well, I think we can draw some basic conclusions. Our unlikely candidate this morning is Judas Iscariot.

And our sermon is titled, God Knows the Heart. Judas was a member of a good group of people. I think we can agree on that.

[7 : 06] Men who had been chosen by Jesus himself. And Judas was one of the original 12, one of the original Jesus dozen.

That's a pretty special group, right? Everywhere he went, he would have been known as a member of this select group. They would have had, people would have been aware of them.

They would have had status. He was part of Jesus' inner circle and would have been almost constantly with him. The apostles slept with him, ate with him, worked with him, ministered with him.

They spent all their time together. They probably went on vacation together, although there weren't many vacations, perhaps. But Judas would have witnessed Jesus' power, his authority, his personality, everything about him firsthand.

He would have heard words that no man had ever spoken before firsthand. So remember, Jesus was not surprised by Judas or his actions.

[8 : 15] Right? For us to read this account and think, wow, how did Jesus not know? He knew. He knew exactly who this man was. He knew exactly what he would do.

He knew exactly what he was getting when he chose him. Jesus knew that Judas wasn't a true believer. And more than that, he knew who he was ultimately really serving.

We can also recognize that Judas wasn't really all that concerned with or invested in Jesus' ministry. Let's take a look at that in John chapter 12, verses 1 to 6.

John 12, 1 to 6. We read there. Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead.

Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume.

[9 : 23] She poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But 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. Judas, 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 in it. Judas put on this act to make himself look compassionate, right?

His motives were far from pure, as the scripture tells us there. He actually didn't ultimately care about ministering to the poor. He was worried about money being wasted.

Judas was only concerned about himself. He was only concerned with losing money that he could potentially get his own hands on at some point.

[10 : 31] All Judas cared about was Judas. He was self-absorbed and would ultimately do anything to get what he wanted.

He didn't think twice about taking from someone else, even Jesus himself. Let's read John 13, 1-4.

We read there, It was just before the Passover festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

The evening meal was in progress and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power and that he had come from God and was returning to God.

So he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing and wrapped a towel around his waist. Judas likely shared, as I said, many meals with Jesus.

[11 : 42] But we recognize here that he sat with him at the Last Supper. He lived this lie right to the very end. And he even had his feet washed by God in the flesh.

Even that deeply humbling, that deeply intimate, I just can't even wrap my head around that experience of having your Savior wash your feet.

Even that experience couldn't change his heart. Why? Because he wasn't following the Lord. He had no interest in that.

My friends, God knows the heart. Judas had given his heart over to evil.

Given his heart over to self-service. And ultimately, there's no other way to say it. That meant giving his heart to the devil.

[12 : 41] Let's read Matthew 27, verse 3 to 6. 27, 3 to 6. We're hopping around the NT a little bit, but that's good for us.

Matthew 27, 3 to 6. When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse. And he returned the 30 pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders.

I have sinned, he said, for I 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. The chief priest picked up the coins and said, It is against the law to put this into the treasury since it is blood money.

We see here that Judas felt guilty. He felt guilty for betraying Jesus. So maybe in the end, he had some conscience for what he had done.

[13 : 54] In his own words, he recognized that he had sinned. Suddenly, he realized that the money wasn't worth the more serious price he had paid in sacrificing his very soul to feed his own desires and greed.

Judas had spent years in the presence of the only one who could have saved him from himself. But he refused to recognize and surrender to Jesus.

And ultimately, he died without him. Let's read Acts 1, 24 to 25. Another New Testament leap there.

Acts 1, 24 and 25. Then they prayed, Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs.

Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias. So he was added to the 11 apostles. Judas' betrayal and his greed and his self-centered ambition led him to forfeit the place that was his, the position that he could have had.

[15 : 18] Ultimately, his sins led him to his own place. Judas, as Scripture says, which left Judas to go to the place where he belongs, which is hell.

In the Bible accounts, Judas expressed guilt. He expressed even remorse for his actions. But we need to recognize there was never any sign of repentance.

There was never any sign of him seeking God's forgiveness. You feel guilty? That's great. That's maybe a start. But it's not the ultimate path you need to take.

Because, friends, sin without repentance, sin without acceptance of Jesus, meant that Judas was lost. Without Jesus, Judas spends, now hear me use the present tense there, Judas spends because he's still there now.

Can you recognize that? Eternity in heaven. Or eternity apart from God in hell. Judas is still there, separated in eternity from God.

[16 : 32] So what can we learn from our unlikely candidate this morning? I think there's lots, but we'll dig in just quickly. First, as our sermon title indicates, the condition of our heart is known by the Lord.

God knows the heart. God knows the heart. He knows our deepest motivations. He knows where we truly put our loyalties and our values.

He knows. You can tell anybody you want anything. And it can be contrary to what's in your heart. Only you and God know the condition of your heart for sure.

From the outside, From the outside, Judas probably looked like he was playing the part. Others would have seen him associating with Jesus and the other disciples. They would have seen his role of responsibility.

He was the treasurer. He paid out money to the poor. He managed the financial aspect of the ministry. But in his heart, He was a thief.

[17 : 39] He despised the fact that this money was, in his mind, being wasted on the ministry. And Jesus knew his heart.

My friends, God knows your heart. You may appear good on the outside. You may associate with the right people. You may put up a good front and do the right things most of the time.

You may be fooling everyone else who thinks they know you. But Jesus knows the true condition of your heart. He looks right in to who you really are.

And He's the one that you can never fool. And ironically, whose relationship is the most important in your life? The one you have with Him.

Second, as we've alluded to, guilt and remorse don't equal repentance. Judas seems to have felt guilty about what he'd done.

[18 : 47] The Bible even says he felt remorseful. Felt regret, probably. He felt so bad, he tried to return the payment he had received to betray Jesus.

But Judas went to the wrong place for forgiveness. We need to recognize that. We've talked about this before in the past. Repentance means turning around.

It means, as we've considered before, to do differently after. It means a 180 in where you were going. Judas could have, should have turned to Jesus for forgiveness.

Even as He hung on the cross that Judas put Him there. Judas could have come to Christ for forgiveness, and he would have received it.

But he still refused to turn to the one, the only one, who could forgive him. Do you feel guilty about your actions?

[19 : 46] Do you feel guilty about something that you've said or done? You may be able to see a counselor to ease your sense of guilt. You may be able to try and place the blame on an event that happened in your past, something that you feel has shaped you.

Try to put the blame on someone else. But friends, you will only be truly forgiven, truly freed from something if you let go of it.

Give it to Jesus and ask Him to forgive you. Friends, feeling guilty about what you've done, that's human. It's not the same as repentance.

True repentance is turning away from your life and your plans and turning towards Jesus. Third, association doesn't equal salvation.

Judas was a member of this team, as we talked about, that was handpicked by Jesus. These men were intended to change the world, and in many ways they have.

[20 : 58] There are people in churches everywhere who are surrounded by others whom Jesus has saved. People whose lives are fully committed to Jesus.

But friends, being in church doesn't mean you're saved. Attending a church or even being a member of a church doesn't even necessarily mean you're a Christian.

It's not that simple. In fact, some of the most un-Christlike behavior I have seen in my life has come from people who would have definitely said they were Christians.

Knowing about Jesus also doesn't fit the bill. Judas knew about Jesus. He spent three years of his life with Him, and he would have known Him well.

He would have known what he liked to eat or not eat. But knowing Jesus also doesn't equal salvation. Knowing facts about Him doesn't mean you have a personal and saving relationship with Him.

[22 : 12] Our fourth point this morning is a really important one. The fate of all lost people is still the same.

Let me explain that. Judas was a member of Jesus' inner circle. He was trusted.

He was an apostle and in many ways was in on the ground floor of God's plan for His church. He was up close and personal with Jesus' holiness, His righteousness, His goodness.

And yet greed and pride got a hold of Him. He lost His way and forgot how to find it again. Satan whispered in Judas' ear and he followed the wrong path.

Judas died a lost man. And he went to the place where Scripture tells us all lost people go. Scripture doesn't ever mince words on this.

[23 : 22] There's one destination. Hell. Friends, we need to be wise and acutely aware that our position in life now does not alter our position in eternity.

You may be a member of a church even in a position of authority or influence. And I'm talking to people broadly beyond our own church.

You may hang out with those people that you perceive to be good Christian people. You may be associated or deeply involved in a ministry of the church.

But I'm going to tell you this morning without believing in Jesus, accepting His gift of the cross, without yielding and surrendering your life and your plans to Him daily if necessary, and intentionally seeking His forgiveness for your sin, you can be at risk for Satan's influence in your life.

and spending your eternity Man, I grieve for the lost.

[24 : 39] Spending your eternity separated from God. I want to warn you of something. Remember, Satan is not all that interested in people who have no interest in God.

People who have no interest in God or His plans for the world, Satan couldn't care less. He's already got them. He is very interested, my brothers and sisters, very interested in those who declare themselves to be God's people, in those who seek to make a way for the work of the church, for those who declare the truth of Scripture, the truth of the gospel.

Satan hates those people. At the risk of scaring you. I have personally felt Satan's influence in a church.

I know others who have as well. And some have even felt Satan's presence in churches where they attended. He's not somehow mystically banned from this building.

He's drawn to it because we are. He's drawn to it because the Holy Spirit is here. He's drawn to it because the people of God will stand against Him.

[26 : 08] And He hates that. And trust me, the churches where I've experienced this presence are not churches where everyone would have perceived to be weird or heretical in any way.

When I've heard stories and I've experienced things myself, these are mainstream places. They were simply places where Satan had chosen to stand against God.

To stand against what his plans were in that place. As I've said already, Satan hates God's people. He hates God's plans.

And one of his main purposes is to destroy them. Satan would like nothing more than for God's people to fall away from him.

To tear one another down with judgment or criticism or gossip. He would love nothing more than for the church in this world to die out.

[27 : 15] That is his goal. Will we as a church body be a place that allows that to happen? It's not even a rhetorical statement.

Or will we declare our allegiance to Jesus? Will we stand against anything and everything Satan tries to bring us down?

We need to be aware and vigilant against Satan's attacks against us both personally and against God's people of the church.

I'm going to close this morning with the words of 1 Peter chapter 5 verses 8 to 1 or 8 to 11 sorry and you don't have to jump there. You'll know this passage.

Be alert and of sober mind. your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

[28 : 14] Resist him standing firm in the faith because you know the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

here's hope and the God of all grace who called you to his eternal glory in Christ after you have suffered a little while will himself restore you and make you strong firm and steadfast to him be the power forever and ever amen to him.