

Interview with the Traitor

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- [0 : 00] and verse 14 through 16 as we interview a traitor. Over the years, some of the highest rated TV figures have been reserved for high-profile interviews.
- In 1995, I remember it well, millions of viewers watched Martin Bashir interview Princess Diana, where Diana famously said, it's a bit crowded when there's three people in a marriage.
- In 1977, I don't remember this, the British interviewer David Frost was involved in a number of public conversations, shall we call them, with the former US President Richard Nixon, where Nixon famously admitted, I let the American people down, and I'm going to have to carry that burden with me for the rest of my life.
- What if we could stage an interview with history's bit noir, Judas Iscariot? What if, rather like Bashir or Frost, we could ask Judas Iscariot anything we wanted?
- Of course, in reality, we can't. But perhaps from the account of Judas' betrayal of Jesus, we might be able to reconstruct what such an interview might sound like.
- [1 : 24] It would, like Frost versus Nixon, need to be a series of interviews covering the few hours between Judas' plan to betray Jesus and Judas' eventual suicide.
- So today, we want to try and reconstruct an interview with Judas Iscariot, taken from this passage in Matthew 26, 14 through 16, corresponding to the planning stage of his betrayal and its very first steps.
- Now, I very, very rarely preach like this. And the only way I'm doing so today is because I think it may shed more light on the real-life situation of this passage than would otherwise be possible.
- And so imagine yourself to be the interviewer for Judas, and Judas Iscariot is sitting on the chair opposite you. You want him to feel at ease, so you're going to ask him some easy questions to warm up.
- Who are you? But then you're going to get into the actions, the motives of the man, by asking, what have you done? Why have you done it? And is it worth it?
- [2 : 37] At the end of it, at least we can have the satisfaction that we have interviewed a traitor. First of all, then, we ask Judas the question as he sits opposite us.
- Who are you? Who are you? And he replies, My name is Judas. Back where I'm from, there are hundreds of people called Judas.
- And so to distinguish between us, we're all given nicknames. I come from the southern part of Israel, from a place called Kerioth.
- So I'm called Judas of Kerioth, or as you will know it better, Judas Iscariot. That, in fact, isn't just my name. It's our family name.
- My father is called Simon Iscariot. You can read about him in John chapter 6 and verse 71. And again, there are hundreds of people called Simon.
- [3 : 37] So to distinguish between them all, it was my father who got the name Iscariot to begin with. And I inherited it. I'm not alone in having a nickname.

After all, my friends James and John are called the Sons of Thunder. And another one of my friends, Thomas, is called Didymus, which means the twin.

Well, as for Kerieth, where I'm from, there isn't much I can tell you about it. It's in the south of Israel proper. Kerieth is mentioned in Joshua chapter 15, verse 25, and is called Kerieth Hezron.

It's about 10 miles south of the southern Israelite city of Hebron. I guess that I'm Kerieth's most famous export. The thing about being from Kerieth is that I don't really understand or even like people who are from the north of Israel, from places like Galilee.

We don't really have that much in common. So I've always struggled to fit into groups which are made up mainly of northerners. To me, they come across as being rather uncultured and poorly spoken.

[4 : 56] They're not purebred Israelites, and I don't even like their accents. I guess the significant thing about me is that I'm one of Jesus' 12 disciples.

I've been with them for nearly three years. The story of how I began to follow Jesus is for another time, but over the years, I've been with them. I have learned a lot. I've seen Jesus do some amazing things, and I've heard Jesus say some amazing things.

If you were to ask me the message Jesus proclaims, I guess I can sum it up by saying, the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the gospel.

I've come across many religious leaders claiming to be the Messiah, but there's something about Jesus which is very, very different. You can tell the rest of them are either mad or they're in it for the money or the prestige, but not Jesus.

He's the real deal. And the thing about Jesus is that when you spend time with them, you quickly realize how, on one hand, how different he is from the rest of us.

[6 : 07] I have never, ever heard Jesus say something he should not have said or do something he should not have done. He always leaves you with the impression that he knows actually everything about you, but he loves you nonetheless.

It really unsettles me because I know Jesus knows all about me, but I also know that Jesus loves me. But then on the other hand, you know, Jesus is no different from any of us.

He gets tired and hungry and thirsty and foot sore and with all the walking we have to do, he needs time out and rest. And I know that sometimes, for a fact, he gets so tired, he can sleep through thunder and lightning on a boat.

So, even though he's very different from us, he's the same of us as well. You know, I read most men pretty well, but whenever you're with him, you always feel that Jesus is reading you.

But for all that, he's been really, really good to me. For three years, I've been one of his closest friends, and Jesus has put his life into my hands. On a couple of occasions, Jesus has sent me and the other disciples out to preach the gospel and tell others about him.

[7 : 29] He has even entrusted me with the purse. I'm officially the treasurer for the kingdom of God. I don't file tax returns, and don't ask me to because, you know, I can't really tell you what happens with all the money.

So, there you are. That's who I am. There's not much to tell. I'm a good southern boy who has fallen in with a bunch of northerners and were disciples of Jesus. I say disciples. That's what other people call us.

I'd rather we just call each other companions or even friends. Yes, that's what I am. I'm one of Jesus' best friends.

We're tight with each other, me and him. The second question the interviewer then turns around to Judas and asks him is this.

What have you done? What have you done? And Judas replies. Do you remember earlier how I said that I find it unsettling that Jesus knows all about me and yet he loves me?

[8 : 36] Well, what makes me feel downright guilty right now is that I know that Jesus knows what I've done. I know because he's been going on about it for the past couple of years and I've got this thing which is going on inside my head saying, you're going to be the one who does this.

I try to shut the voice up, but the more I try, the louder the voice gets. Yes, Jesus knows what I've done. He hasn't told anyone else about it yet, but eventually he will.

But by then I'll be a hero living in a mansion and he'll thank me for what I've done. But anyway, to get back to the question, what have I done? Well, I've gone to the chief priests.

Yes, the chief priests. The very same chief priests who plotted, withheaded the massacre of the infants after the birth of Jesus. The very same chief priests who said they were looking for a sly way to kill Jesus.

They are Jesus' enemies and strictly speaking, I shouldn't be going anywhere near them. I could get in trouble with Jesus and my friends. I don't really see what's wrong with it.

[9 : 46] After all, they are the religious leaders of Israel. They serve in Israel's temple in Jerusalem. They are the senior politicians in our parliament. Surely they won't do what they say they will.

They won't really kill Jesus. They'll never get away with it. But not only have I gone to the chief priests, I've asked them a question. I've said to them, what are you willing to give me if I hand Jesus over to you?

I have made them an offer they cannot refuse. They've been trying to find Jesus for the last while, but they can't seem to find him anywhere. But Jesus trusts me.

I'm his friend. And I think I can use that trust to my own benefit. I can arrange for him to be handed over to the chief priests and the religious leaders of Israel.

Even now, I've got something in mind for later on. Because I know that Jesus goes to a particular garden in the evening and a word in the right ear will reap a rich reward.

[10 : 52] One night's work and I'll be rich. So that's what I've done. I have struck a deal with the chief priests and we've shaken on it.

Well, not really. I wanted to shake their hands, but for some reason they didn't want to shake mine. And they've given me 30 pieces of silver. And for that, I promised I'm going to hand Jesus over. Please don't use the word betray.

It's so crass. Yes, I know the word is the same as that word for hand over, but I like to look at things in their best light. I'm not a traitor. I'm just an interested businessman and politician.

So from now on, I'm going to be looking for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them. After this interview, I'm going to be going back to be with Jesus and the other disciples because we're going to have a meal together.

I heard them talking earlier about an upper room somewhere in the city. I guess I'll just have to wait and see. So there you are. That's what I've done. And perhaps if you had been in my shoes, you'd have done the same thing.

[11 : 58] The thing is, though, I can't help feeling just a bit unsettled because for all that I'm coming across confident to you, I just know that Jesus knows what I've done.

But what I really can't get my head around is that I also know he still loves me. Okay, that's the second question.

You're the interviewer. You've asked him, who are you? You've asked him, what have you done? The third question, as his interviewer, you ask him now is, why have you done it? Why have you done it?

This is the million-dollar question, is it not? Judas replies. Why have I done it? I have the means to commit the crime. I am, after all, one of Jesus' closest friends.

But what is the motive? After all, we all have motives for what we do, do we not? Sometimes the motives are good and the actions are not. Sometimes the actions are good and the motives are not.

[12 : 58] You can work out for yourself what you think about my motives and actions. But personally, I haven't got much of a problem with them right now. They strike me as okay.

After all, I've got the same needs as the next guy. And after all, you know what they say? Something's only wrong if you get caught. I guess my motives aren't one or the other.

I guess they're both. What I mean is that there are two things which are motivating me to hand Jesus over to the chief priests. And for the life of me, I can't work out which of the two I'm more passionate about.

Maybe you can help me with that later. In the first instance, I'm just like the next guy when it comes to this. I like the feel of money in my pocket.

Please don't tell me you're any different. There's a sense in which Jesus has been his own worst enemy in this. I became the treasurer of the kingdom of God. And over the years, yes, I've helped myself to a wee bit of the money.

[14 : 03] Not much, you understand. Not enough that it would be noticed. But why look a gift horse in the mouth? I've been given all this money. Surely no one will notice if I just take a little of it.

I could even justify it as personal expenses. No one will notice. You can call it greed if you want to. But I prefer to call it financial prudence.

That's me set up for the next few years at no risk to myself. Yes, I know you say the love of money is the root of all evil. But honest, I don't love money.

I just like the feel of pounds in my pocket. As I look back in my history books, so did Solomon. And he was wise, right? Well, that's me too.

In years to come, people will read about me in the history books and say he was wise. Then in the second instance, when it comes to doing business with the big boys in Jerusalem, I like playing politics.

[15 : 14] I'm an important man, don't you know? I like pounds, but I like politics and power. And I think I'm doing Jesus a service by going to the chief priests. Let me explain. As far as I can see, they hate him.

They've not hidden the fact. They don't like me either, but at least I can speak to them without them murdering me on the spot. They think I'm doing them a favor by handing Jesus over to them.

But in reality, it's not them I'm serving. I'm still serving Jesus. What perhaps you don't know about me is that my favorite disciple, my best friend among the disciples is a man called Simon the Zealot.

Now, there's a man who I respect. We've gone on mission trips together. We've spent hours talking about how to get rid of the Romans. These unclean Gentile Roman pigs are polluting the land of Israel by their presence here.

And I, for one, can't wait to see the back of them. And Simon is with me in this. In fact, it's Simon who has been egging me on. We want the Romans out.

[16 : 22] We want Israel to be great again. Now, both of us believe that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah. And as we understand it from what we've been taught in the Old Testament, the Messiah is going to be the king of Israel.

And we believe that he will gather to him an army and riding in its head will defeat all its enemies. Israel will be great again.

Greater than it was even in the days of King David. That's not the kind of Messiah Jesus seems to want to be. I mean, what's wrong with him?

All he ever does is talk about giving himself for the sins of the world and crucifixion. I've just come from the house of Simon the leper. Jesus was talking about his burial.

I mean, his burial. At this rate, Jesus is never going to do the right thing and become the king of Israel. So I'm taking it upon myself. I'm going to get Jesus arrested and hopefully that's going to stir him into action.

[17 : 30] I've seen how popular he is for the people. A few days ago when we arrived in Jerusalem, the crowds were thronging the streets and they were waving branches in the air. And they were all shouting, Hosanna to the son of David.

It's Passover time here in Jerusalem. There are hundreds of thousands of Jews. If getting Jesus arrested leads to an uprising against the Romans, then Jesus will become the kind of Messiah Simon and I think he should be.

The warrior king of Israel. He will make Israel great again. So you see, you can spin my motives either way.

If you want to be cynical, yes, you can say I like pounds. But if you're being generous, you might say, well, I like politics. But either way, at this stage, I can't see how the plan can fail.

I'm Judas Iscariot. I'm not one of these hicks from the north. I know how politics works. It's a risk, but it's a calculated risk.

[18 : 38] I'm 30 pieces of silver betted off. And hopefully, if everything goes to plan within a couple of days, Jesus will begin to raise an army which once and for all will rid Israel of the Romans.

It's funny, though, because even as I say these things to you, I remember something Jesus said many years ago when I first started following.

He said, Do not store up for yourselves treasures in heaven. Treasures in earth, rather, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal.

But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven. Store up for yourselves, not treasures on earth, but treasures in heaven. And I also remember something he said to us about worldly politics.

He said to us, You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. This is what Jesus said.

[19 : 37] He said, Instead, whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant. And whoever wants to be first must be your slave. I know that Jesus knows what I've done.

I just hope he realizes that it's partly for his own good that I've done it. After all, he can't always be right, can he? The interviewer at this stage is kind of stunned.

And he just can't work out what to say next. So he finishes with this question. He says, Is it worth it, Judas? Judas. Is it worth it, Judas?

Judas replies, Well, that's a good question. Let me tell you, it's going to be the last one. I've got to get back to this supper, the supper that Jesus and the other disciples were talking about on this upper room.

I am now the proud owner of 30 pieces of shiny silver. You ask me if what I've done is worth it. Well, I want to answer in two ways. In the short term, if everything works out the way I want it to, of course it's going to be worth it.

[20 : 53] I'm already 30 pieces of silver betted off. Okay, it sounds like a lot of money to you. I guess in your money it might transfer to 500 pounds.

It's not bad for an hour's work, is it? 500 pounds. But then I still can't get my head around what happened last night. Last night, we were in the house of Simon the leper in Bethany.

And a woman came in with an alabaster jar full of perfume. And she broke the neck of that jar and poured all the perfume over Jesus' head. Now that perfume was worth 50 times more than these 30 pieces of silver.

My silver is worth 500 pounds. The perfume was worth 25,000 pounds. What a waste that this perfume should have been used in that way.

I said my piece, but Jesus wouldn't listen. It seems a bit unfair to me that I'm getting 500 pounds for taking a big risk. What if she was willing to waste 25,000 pounds just like that?

[21 : 59] You know, the thought has been going through my head all day. The reward for betraying Jesus is always lower than the cost of devotion to Jesus.

What do you think about that? Am I just talking rubbish to myself or is that true? The reward for betraying Jesus is always lower than the cost of devotion to Jesus.

But the second way I want to answer your question about whether it's all worth it is to ask you to wait and see. Wait and see. I personally guarantee that things will work out the way I planned.

Jesus will be arrested. There's going to be a riot, an uprising. The religious fervor among my countrymen will lead them to crowning Jesus as king over Israel. And he will lead our armies against the Romans.

Of course, for the last while, Jesus has been predicting that he's going to be handed over to the Romans and then be crucified. No way, Jose.

[23 : 04] That's not going to happen. Even less that on the third day he will rise from the dead, as he keeps saying he will. Mark my words when I say this.

All this talk of Jesus dying on the cross to take away the sins of the world will prove unnecessary. I'm going to make sure that he never needs to suffer.

A man like Jesus should sit on a golden throne, not suffer on a Roman cross. A man like him should ride at the head of a vast army, not die in shame on a hill outside Jerusalem.

Trust me, for years to come, because of what I've done, the name of Jesus will be famous. Because he'll be the greatest king Israel ever had.

When they think of Jesus, they're going to think of a huge throne and how he defeated the Romans. They're not going to think of a cross and how by his sacrificial death there, he defeated sin, death, and the devil.

[24 : 13] Mark my words. I'm right in what I've done. And if I'm not right, I'll eat my hat or even worse. That concludes our interview with Judas Iscariot.

And he walks out of the studio with a skip in his step. He's got both a confident smile on his face and the jingle of 30 silver coins in his pockets.

The question for all of us who have viewed that interview is, Is he right? Is he right? Let us pray.

As we read in the book of Proverbs, O Lord, week on week, about the difference between wisdom and foolishness, we are dumbstruck when we realize how foolish Judas was to believe that any of his schemes and plans could ever have worked.

We, O Lord, think that it's within our natural wisdom to be able to tell you how things are going to work out in our lives. That your wisdom is greater and deeper than ours.

[25 : 26] The way of your son was the way of suffering. The way he conquered was not by riding at the head of a vast army and being crowned king of Israel, but by dying on a Roman cross, thereby defeating sin, death, and the devil, and rising from the grave on the third day.

Lord, take away from our minds anything which would have distracted our minds from the main message of this passage. The foolishness of Judas.

His contempt for the idea of a suffering Messiah. The greed of Judas. And how he loved the pounds in his pocket more than he loved devotion to you.

Lord, we recognize the one bit of wisdom in what he said. That the reward for betraying Jesus is always lower than the cost of devotion to Jesus.

We are willing, O Lord, to pay the cost of devotion to Jesus. We are willing also, O Lord, by your grace to walk the road of suffering.

[26 : 37] We're willing to be like him. So will you, O Lord, bless us richly, we pray. Keep us from the foolishness and the greed of Judas. May all the glory be yours always.

Amen. Don't worry, I...