

Judas Iscariot

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[0 : 00] We'll turn again to that last reading, chapter 27 of Matthew, and verse 3 once again. Matthew 27, 3, then, when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the 30 pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, saying, I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.

They said, What is that to us? See to it yourself. Amen. Every week there seems to be another horrific report of a death of a soldier in Afghanistan.

This week's report was utterly horrific, not only because it involved the deaths of five soldiers, but they were killed by someone who they trusted, someone in their own uniform or in a friendly uniform, someone who was the last person they expected to be the source of their death.

You know, it is tragic enough when soldiers are killed, indeed, when anybody's killed, but what makes it so much worse, that they were shot by an Afghan policeman, someone in Afghan uniform that they thought they could trust.

Similarly, in America, in the United States, again, someone who they thought they could trust was the source of the death of 12 American soldiers.

[1 : 43] These two acts of murder are the worst you can think of. It's one thing to be involved in a war where getting killed is the risk you take at the hands of the enemy. When you sign up for the army, that's the risk you take.

You do so knowing that there is that possibility. But for someone you trust to turn on you, someone who you expect to be on your own side, it is absolutely unthinkable.

I can't imagine what it must be like to have to live with an atmosphere where you can't trust someone in your own uniform. You don't know when and where someone who is masquerading in your own side is going to turn his gun and to shoot you.

It must be utterly horrifying and frightening. You wouldn't know where to look. You wouldn't know where to turn. You wouldn't know when to close your eyes at night. You wouldn't know when something unexpected was going to happen.

But such is the way of betrayal. Betrayal is when someone you trusted turns against you, and it can happen in different forms. I guess the worst is what I've just described, when someone actually turns to kill you.

[2 : 53] But there are other forms of betrayal as well. Many a wife is tonight trying to come to terms with a husband who she's just discovered has been cheating on her.

On a lesser but no less real level is the friend who turns out to have been plotting against you or talking about you, undermining you behind your back, who's saying one thing to your face, and then you discover that that very person who you thought was on your side or who was able to be trusted is against you, seeking your downfall, and he's acting as a traitor.

Even on a basic level, as we begin to look at Jesus' betrayal or Judah's betrayal, one thing we can say is this.

Jesus knows what it is to be turned against by a friend. Jesus had plenty of enemies. He had plenty of people. There were plenty of people during his ministry who wanted to see him dead.

That's bad enough. But when his end did come, when his crucifixion did come, it was facilitated not by the Pharisees, but by his own friend, someone who had been with him and walked with him and talked with him for three years.

[4 : 08] And one thing you can't say tonight is that Jesus doesn't know what it is to be betrayed. He completely understands. And when we go to him as those who have been betrayed, in whatever form that takes, we go to him as our great high priest, the Bible tells us, who is touched with a feeling of our infirmities.

He knows what it is to be betrayed. He knows our every situation. He knows sorrow and he knows hardship. He knows frustration.

He knows temptation. There is nothing that Jesus doesn't know about, even when someone who we once knew untrusted turns against us. That's the first thing I want to say about Judas and about Jesus and this whole sad, sorry affair.

Second thing is this, that there is a very important difference between momentary denial of Jesus, which Peter was guilty of, and the betrayal of Jesus, which Judas was guilty of.

And I believe that the two incidents are put side by side in the same story in the Gospels for your encouragement and for my encouragement, so that you don't confuse the two things.

[5 : 24] There's a world of difference between what Peter did in momentarily denying Jesus and in saying in the heat of the moment, in the stress of the moment, that he did not know Jesus.

And that was a sin that he committed from which he repented, and he was brought back into fellowship with Jesus after Jesus was raised from the dead. Now, that's one thing. It's another thing altogether to think and to focus on what Judas did, which was to plot the downfall of Jesus out of hatred and out of malice and out of unbelief.

That's a totally different thing altogether. And Judas did not repent from that. And we'll look in a wee moment as to what he meant when he said that he was, that I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.

That was not a confession, a true confession. It was an expression of remorse and sorrow. There's a world of difference between that kind of expression and what Peter did when he was received back with tears to the Lord himself.

So it's an important difference. And I say that because many a person is put off or who feels that they're put off by put off making a commitment to Jesus because they're afraid that they might be a Judas.

[6 : 44] Well, whatever you fear, if the Lord is speaking to you tonight and if he's showing you your need of Jesus, you come to him because there's no safer place anywhere in the universe than in Jesus Christ, following Jesus Christ.

And you leave all that to him. You leave all that to him. And don't listen to the devil as he tries to put you off coming to Jesus by saying to you, ah, you might be false. You might be bogus.

You might be a fraud. What makes you think that you're the genuine article? And many as a person, I think, are tripped up in such a way. So there's an important difference between Peter and Judas.

That's the second thing. Nevertheless, Judas is the most astonishing man. And it really forces us to pause when we're looking at these readings and these chapters that tell us about what he did.

It's almost beyond belief, isn't it, to think of someone who lived for three years as part of Jesus' inner circle and then to betray, really, the person who was the best friend he ever had.

[7 : 54] How could the one who had the privilege of walking, as somebody else said, let me quote someone else, how could the one who had the privilege of walking alongside the light of the world end up in eternal darkness?

Because that's where he went. One thing we can be absolutely sure of, that Judas went to a lost eternity. There's no question whatsoever about that.

He saw everything that Jesus did, everything that the other disciples saw. He heard all the teaching. He saw what we wish we could have seen. He heard what we wish we could have heard.

And to all intents and purposes, he gave every appearance from the outside of being just as faithful and just as obedient, a follower of Jesus as the rest.

He had the opportunity of turning away. You know, of course, that there were many disciples, people who said they followed Jesus, dozens of them who followed him. They said they were disciples. But John 6 tells us that there came a point where they were so shaken in their commitment to Jesus that some of them said, well, we don't want to follow you anymore.

[9 : 08] We can't. This is a hard saying. Who can accept it? And from that time, John tells us, many of his disciples decided not to follow him anymore. And Jesus then turned to the 12 and he said to them, will you also go away?

And that was when Peter said, Lord, to whom else shall we go? You have the words of everlasting life and we believe and we know that you are the son of God. Now, Judas would have been amongst those, not amongst those who went and left Jesus.

That's where you would expect him to be. But he was amongst those who persisted and those who stayed and those who were right behind Peter when he said, Lord, to whom else shall we go? You have the words of everlasting life. So he gave every appearance from the outside of being just as faithful, just as committed, a follower of Jesus as everyone else in the 12.

It was quite astonishing. Judas would have been amongst those who were sent out to preach the gospel. Matthew 10, Jesus sent his disciples two by two to every town and village to perform miracles and to cast out demons in Jesus' name.

[10:20] And you know, the astonishing thing is that the very person who spent some of his ministry casting out demons from others ended up being possessed by the devil himself as he betrayed Jesus.

Casting out demons is no guarantee of our salvation. Preaching the gospel is no guarantee of our salvation.

You can't put your trust in the church, in the right church, in the right creed, in your job. You can't put your trust in your office as an elder or a minister.

You can only put your trust in one person and one person alone and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. That was Judas. Now I'm not saying that Judas was saved one minute and he was lost the next minute.

I'm not saying that it's impossible. The Bible does not teach that it is possible to be saved one minute and the next day be lost. That is not, it's absurd to say that.

[11:29] Because for one thing, our salvation is in the hands of God and God does not lose those who are his. It's quite clear at the end of the day that Judas, even having given every appearance appearance of being one of Jesus' disciples that he wasn't a true follower.

He was never a true follower of Jesus. That's what makes it so astonishing. And yet he lived for three years as a follower and made such a good job of it that when Jesus at the Last Supper said, he announced that one of you is going to betray me, all of the disciples said, Lord, is it I?

They had no clue. They had no idea as to who it was going to be. That's how good a job he made of appearing to be one of Jesus' disciples.

Neither, I'm going to say this before, and again, this is the last thing by way of just a preliminary few comments. Neither, and I think I'm going to say this for a particular reason, and I'll explain in a wee minute why.

Neither am I saying that somehow or other that this man, Judas, was born for the purpose of betraying Jesus. A few years ago, there was that teaching amongst some that somehow or other that God had kind of put Judas into this world and his purpose was simply this, to betray Jesus and once he had done so, God had no more use for him and just left him to fall into despair and to commit suicide.

[13:14] That's nonsense. That is simply not the case. Judas, when he betrayed Jesus, he did so deliberately, knowing full well what he did.

He did so because he wanted to and even though we read that the devil entered into him, the devil would have got nowhere near him if Judas had not been willing, if he had not been a willing vessel to receive the devil and to act on the devil's influences.

You see, we have to be made willing to do what the devil wants us to do and someone who is truly in the Lord Jesus Christ and who loves and who lives in love to the Lord Jesus Christ will not be possessed by the devil and will because he is a closed door to, I'm not saying the devil has no influence on that person.

He's got influence on all of us. Which one of us is not tempted one day after another to do some or to think something wrong but Judas was different.

So what do we make of him then? What was it? What can we glean? Is there anything? Any clues? Are there any clues? Sometimes there are clues as to the motives behind some actions that can be deduced after the event.

[14:30] Can we take what's written in the Gospels and can we find out anything about Judas that will give us information as to what his motives were? We'll never really know I guess what went on in the inside of the heart of this man.

But there are one or two things that may suggest what lay deep within his heart. Some people suggest first of all that like Simon the disciple he was a zealot.

Now the zealots that meant that he belonged to a group of Jews that were determined to rid the land of Palestine of the Roman occupation. You remember of course at that time that the Romans were occupying the land of Palestine and the Jews resented it greatly and their great messianic hope was that the Messiah would build his earthly kingdom and that he would rule over them and that he would rid them of the Roman occupation.

And it could be that at the beginning when he saw Jesus and he saw the power of Jesus that he hoped that Jesus would be the long-awaited and long-hoped-for leader and king. But as time went on it became apparent that this was not going to happen.

And he perhaps Judas got more and more bitter. In other words he never understood the gospel and he put his own agenda his own political agenda his own opinions above listening to Jesus.

[15:59] And I wonder if even before we go any further that speaks to some of us this evening. Perhaps it is that you are in the same position this evening where instead of listening to Jesus you listen to yourself and your own agenda and your own opinions and you put them before just listening and submitting and completely surrendering to what Jesus says about you.

The Bible comes to us and tells us that the answer to our problems is not in some political solution it is in cleansing and transforming our hearts.

What we need more than anything else tonight is to be born again. That's what you need. And you might be one of these people who's concerned for the needs of the world. That's okay. That's alright.

But the Bible tells us God tells you that your first need is yourself. You need to be born again. And if you want to go and help the world and if you want to change the world that's how you're going to do it.

By bringing the gospel of redemption and forgiveness and reconciliation to God to a lost and a helpless world. That's how to really transform the world.

[17:12] But many people stop short and they say no, no. We need a different political system. We need to replace the system that we have with something else. No. God says no and it could be that Judas struggled and fought with what he saw and what he believed in his own heart and he put what he believed in himself over and above what Jesus wanted to teach him.

Is that you tonight? Is there a struggle going on between your ideas and what God is telling you through the Bible? Stop.

Put your ideas away. Lean not to your own understanding the Bible says. Trust in the Lord with all your heart. That's what it says.

Others suggest that there's something in the word Iscariot that means simply this the man from Kerioth. Now that could be an interesting suggestion because here are all the disciples and Judas is always kind of tagged along at the end.

Now I'm not sure whether the reason behind that is the fact that he turned out to betray Jesus and that's why he's always at the end. But it could be that he was always kind of just tagged on at the end and he was the man from Kerioth.

[18:36] Nothing more than that. And that doesn't really sound very important and it wasn't very important. And there's something within our hearts isn't there that yearns for more significance and for more recognition and for more attention than we very often get.

Our pride within us sometimes does not settle for being a nobody. Now you might be a somebody in the world outside in the world of business and finance and industry but the moment you come to Christ you come and be part of a church a world of followers of Jesus Christ in which everyone is a nobody.

You're as ordinary as any other person and our pride sometimes can't let go of that lust after importance and affection and recognition and it could be that the idea of the man from Kerrioth just got to him.

He wanted something more than that. He wanted more recognition. He wanted more say in what should happen because he believed perhaps that he had more to contribute. The fact is that none of us have anything to contribute to our own salvation.

We are entirely dependent upon Jesus Christ and him alone and that's something we have to contend with isn't it? I'm asking you tonight what's the greatest barrier that stops you coming to faith in Jesus Christ?

[20:17] And I reckon that it's your own pride. The pride that says no no I know that there are wrong things in my life. I know that my life is full of flaws but I can't bring myself to think that I'm

quite as needy and as sinful as the Bible makes it out to be and as you try and make me out to be. Well listen, I'm not trying to make out as if you're any more sinful than I am. We're all dead in trespasses and sins. That's what the Bible tells us and that's why we need to find Christ because we are dead in trespasses and sins.

That is our greatest need. But you know the biggest clue as far as I can see anyway, the biggest clue to Judas Iscariot is found in this incident where in Matthew 26 and in John chapter 12 Mary and Bethany decided to anoint the feet of Jesus.

You remember what happened? Jesus had raised her brother Lazarus from the dead in John 11 and in order to celebrate, in order to honour Jesus she invited him and his disciples to a dinner at her home and while they were having dinner she took the most precious thing in her home, it was worth a fortune, an alabaster box full of ointment and she broke it and she poured the ointment on Jesus' feet and she wiped her feet with her hair.

Now Matthew's gospel tells us in verse 8 when the disciples saw it they were indignant, no doubt they had a part to play in the complaint that they made and they said why this waste?

[21 : 58] This could have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor but John's gospel tells us that leading this rebellion, leading this complaint was you guessed it, Judas Iscariot.

He was the spokesman, why this waste? And John goes on to tell us that the reason that Judas said this, making out as if he cared so much for the poor, was that he actually couldn't give anything for the poor but that he was a thief, he was the treasurer of the disciples, he had been appointed to be the treasurer of the disciples and he was in charge of the money, John tells us that he would from time to time cream off some of the money for himself.

Now I think that's the most, the clearest pointer to what lay in the heart of Judas Iscariot. And the pointer is this, that here we have a man who does not, instead of admitting and confessing once and for all that there is a deep-seated darkness in his own heart, decides to allow that darkness and that sin to continue and it grows and it grows and it eventually takes over and consumes him and brings him to the point where he is prepared to get rid of the only person who can rescue him and deliver him from his sin.

It's a bit, I suppose, like Herod, isn't it? Although Herod wasn't one of John's disciples. Herod had the opportunity of repenting and listening to John the Baptist. And yet Herod had this, he allowed himself to be consumed by his love for his wife, for his woman and her daughter.

so much so that it eventually just completely overpowered him to the point where he annihilated the only person that could point him to his own salvation.

[24 : 04] You know, that's a really frightening thought. It's a really frightening thought because it tells us tonight that if we don't come to terms with a deceitfulness, with a subtlety of our own sin, then it's going to come to terms with us.

It's going to consume us. It's going to get the better of us and it's going to be the death of us. Because the struggle is going on at the moment, but somebody has to win.

It's either going to be Jesus if you come to him and surrender to him, or it's going to be sin. That's it. You can't play around with it for the rest of your life.

Here is a man and he's struggling. He's obviously got a problem. You know, sin is always a problem. You know, we talk about, well, he has a drink problem. Sin is addictive.

Sin in its very nature takes hold of us just in the same way as alcohol takes hold of and drugs take hold of some people. Sin by its very nature takes hold of us.

[25 : 09] And if you haven't discovered that yet, then you're fooling yourself. At the end of the day, it will lead to a certain point. It will lead to victory for one. Either Jesus is going to have the victory in your life by saving you from that sin and releasing you and delivering you from it, or else you're going to give sin the victory.

And that's what Judas chose to do. To give his own sin, his own selfishness, his own greed, and his own lust for power.

he decided that that was going to be what was going to get the better of him. You know, Judas' end is one of the most tragic you can think of.

Of course, there is a question mark over how he died in chapter 27. Matthew's gospel tells us that he went and hanged himself. And the Acts of the Apostles tell us that he fell and that his body was broken and that so on and so forth.

You can read the details in Acts. And some people, of course, try and make out that there's a contradiction. There's no contradiction at all. It can be very easily explained if you make the point of explaining.

[26 : 18] There's also a question mark over the prophecy that's quoted here in chapter 27 and verse 8 and 9. The prophecy is attributed to Jeremiah.

In actual fact, it comes from Zechariah. Although there is a section in Jeremiah, there's a couple of verses which do fit. again, once again, I'm not going to go into the details.

It would be, it would take away from what we're saying tonight to go into the details. But I can assure you that there are explanations for these details. The great tragedy here is that this man could have had everlasting life.

He was as close to Jesus as any other of the, as any one of the disciples were. And yet, when it came to the point, when it came to the bit, he chose to allow the devil to enter into him.

As I said, the devil does not enter into someone who's not willing to have him come in. It's strange, isn't it? It's tragic, isn't it? That it was the choice between either allowing Jesus to come into him and to cleanse him and to wash him and to transform him or the devil.

[27 : 36] And he chose the latter. It's one or the other. That's the way it is. It's one or the other. And instead of listening to Jesus with an open and a willing heart, which I really hope that you have this evening, willing to accept Jesus' forgiveness, he chose to follow whatever his own agenda was and to put his own ambitions and his own greed ahead of listening to Jesus.

It's like that with you tonight. You're that close to having everlasting life. That close.

You've read his word. You know the gospel. You know what he commands you. You know what he requires of you. And yet, for some reason, you choose something else.

You choose to say no to Jesus. That was what Judas did. It's plain and simple. Chose to say no to what Jesus came to do.

And if you're not for Jesus, you're against him. Last thing I want to say tonight is don't be tempted to feel sorry for Judas. The world is full of tragedies.

[28 : 46] The world is full of people who live and die in misery, never having heard the gospel. The world is full of sorry people, people who deserve you and I to feel sorry for them and to pray for them and to and people who have had no chance in life and whose lives are full of grief and sorrow and illness and despair and so on.

These are the people I feel sorry for are lost and a broken world. I'm afraid I find no sympathy for Judas at all because he had every opportunity. There wasn't a more privileged man in all the world.

God. And yet he chose to betray in spite of all the evidence. Saw Jesus walking on the water.

He took part in him feeding the five thousand. He listened to the Sermon on the Mount. He discovered why it was that Jesus came into the world to give his life as a ransom for many.

And yet he chose to turn his back upon the Son of God. I wouldn't be tempted to feel sorry for him at all.

[30 : 00] He had every opportunity. And don't confuse Judas' sorrow for repentance. Don't allow yourself to think that somehow Judas was prevented from really repenting in sorrow.

He wasn't prevented at all. Everything Judas did, he did on his own volition. He did because he wanted to do it. He chose his own destiny.

And tonight, if you don't listen to Jesus with an open heart, you're choosing your own destiny. It's the same thing.

It doesn't have to be like that. What Jesus asks us to do tonight is to turn. It's the one thing that Judas didn't do.

He heard, he took part, he saw, he experienced, but he never turned. that's what was missing.

[31 : 12] And I hope it won't be missing in you. Let's pray. Father in heaven, we pray that Judas' example in the scriptures will frighten us and alarm us into questioning where we stand with relation to Jesus this evening.

And we ask, O Lord, that we will come to you and that we will not make that awful choice that Judas made in rejecting the authority and the lordship of Jesus over him.

We ask, O Lord, that we will come to surrender. Each one of us will surrender to who Jesus was and what he came to do and will accept his gift of forgiveness and everlasting life.

Lord, bless our time together, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.