

# I Met Jesus: Judas Iscariot

## John 13:21-30

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Today we are going to learn from the life of someone who is most certainly in hell. I don't mean might be there, I mean someone who Jesus said was going there. If Jesus the Judge says you are going there, you are going there.

We are doing one message on the most notorious man in all of human history – more notorious than Dillinger, Bundy, Stalin, Pol Pot, and in a sense, even Hitler. He is the most reviled traitor of all time. If there is a scale of punishment in hell, which I think there is, he is receiving its harshest penalty.

Whenever Scripture mentions his name, his act of betrayal is also listed with it. He cannot escape in Scripture or eternity what he did.

Who is our *I Met Jesus* character? You may have guessed it – Judas Iscariot.

### Who was Judas Iscariot?

Like other names we have studied, Judas was a common name in the day. Judas is a form of "Judah," one of the 12 sons of Jacob and one of the 12 tribes of Israel. There were a few Judases in Jesus' life. He had a brother named Judas. He had another disciple also named Judas, likely the brother of James. And then there was Judas Iscariot.

Why is he called "Iscariot"? Last week we saw that Mary Magdalene meant Mary from the town of Magdala. That was easy. Iscariot is more challenging. It may mean he was from the town of Kerioth, but that is unlikely. It may mean he was part of the secret resistance group *sicarii*, which means "dagger-bearer." They were a kind of underground resistance group against the Romans. *Sicarii* sounds like Iscariot, but nobody knows, so it is merely speculation. Here's what we do know – very few new parents are choosing to name their son Judas.

What is much known is the character of the man. His reputation is defined by his betrayal of Jesus.

- Every list of disciples lists Judas last
- The one list in which he is not last is the one where he is not mentioned at all (Acts 1:13)
- When Judas is named, typically it is also stated what he did to Jesus
  - "*Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.*" (Matthew 10:4)
  - "*...and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.*" (Mark 3:19)
  - "*...and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.*" (Luke 6:16)

Whatever good he may have done in his life, his act of betrayal so defined him, that the New Testament writers couldn't write his name without that betrayal coming to their minds. We will get into John 13 and the Upper Room in a moment, but I want to set the stage with Judas' story.

## **The Incredible Privileges of Judas Iscariot**

### **He had a front row seat for Jesus' miracles**

- In the boat when Jesus walked on the Sea of Galilee and when he calmed the sea
- He gathered his own basket of leftovers when Jesus fed the 15,000 with a few loaves and fish
- He saw the before and after of Jesus' healings (lepers, blind, disfigured, deaf)
- He saw Lazarus' resurrection and personally spoke with him afterwards

### **He had a front row seat for Jesus' teachings**

- He heard the Sermon on the Mount and many others
- He experienced what amazed the crowds: Jesus' power in teaching
- He was disciplined by Jesus in teachings as they walked and talked

### **He was given authority by Jesus to teach and exercise spiritual authority**

*"And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction." (Matthew 10:1)*

Judas' ministry as a disciple was so consistent with the others that when Jesus says that one of them would betray him, the disciples had no idea which one it would be. No one looked at Judas and said, "We all know it's you. You couldn't preach your way out of a brown paper bag and you never healed anybody. And frankly, you have this sinister look on your face. We've had our eyes on you this whole time."

To the contrary, Judas was named treasurer of the group and managed their money. That is NOT a position given to someone you don't think highly of or trust. He betrayed that trust, and we are told he was a thief and secretly pilfered from the money bag.

### **Day in and day out for three years, he lived with the Incarnate Son of God**

Can you imagine? It's not like they were staying at the Ritz Carlton every night. They would have slept outside. Talked around the fire. Done normal life things together, like preparing meals, bathing, and walking. They saw each other tired, hungry, sick – the normal stuff of the human experience.

I was just with a group from our church in Israel for 10 days. You get to know people when you travel with them and live with them. You see each other *au naturel* in ways that you don't in normal church life (and it may be just as well). We got an up close and personal look at each other.

Judas had that up close and personal view of Jesus for three years. It was a nearly unimaginable privilege. What is it like to live with a perfect human being? Jesus never sinned once. Judas never saw anything that would make him think to himself, *And he says he's the Messiah? Who does he think he is? God?* Jesus never compromised his integrity. Never had a selfish moment. Never had a contradiction between his talk and his walk. He was absolute perfection in action, attitude, and motivation. Every glimpse Judas had of Jesus was a life lived by a perfect standard of righteousness both externally and internally.

This fact multiplies his guilt. He knew Jesus as few did. He knew him as an intimate friend.

## The Story of Judas

This brings us to John 13. Jesus has gathered with his disciples in the Upper Room. It is Thursday night of his final week. Jesus is going to eat the Passover meal with them. But behind the scenes of the story there is treachery in motion against him. The Pharisees and the Sanhedrin are involved in a plot to kill him. To do so, they need someone on the inside. Someone close to Jesus. Someone who knew his patterns and schedule. Someone who could betray him to them at night, out of sight of the adoring crowd. At night, when their hatred of Jesus could find its fullest evil expression. But who in Jesus' trusted circle would do such a thing?

It was their happiest day when out of the blue, Judas came to them and offered to betray him into their hands. *"Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve. He went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray him to them. And they were glad, and agreed to give him money. So he consented and sought an opportunity to betray him to them in the absence of a crowd."* (Luke 22:3-6)

So the whole trap is set. The price? Thirty pieces of silver, as was prophesied (Zechariah 11:11-13); the price of a slave. Judas simply had to find the right moment. That Thursday night in the Upper Room, it was perfect.

*During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him."* (John 13:2-5)

If there is a creepy moment in the Bible, this is it. In an incredible display of selflessness and service, Jesus, the Son of God, washes the disciples' feet one by one. At some point, he came to Judas. Jesus knew what Judas would do. Can you imagine? He took Judas' dirty feet into his hands and tenderly wiped them clean. He was displaying love and service to the very man whose betrayal would kill him. Powerful.

*"After saying these things, Jesus was troubled in his spirit, and testified, "Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me." The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he spoke. One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was reclining at table close to Jesus, so Simon Peter motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. So that disciple, leaning back against Jesus, said to him, "Lord, who is it?" Jesus answered, "It is he to whom I will give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it." So when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. Then after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, "What you are going to do, do quickly." Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. Some thought that, because Judas had the moneybag, Jesus was telling him, "Buy what we need for the feast," or that he should give something to the poor. So, after receiving the morsel of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night."* (John 13:21-30)

In verse 21, Jesus was "troubled in spirit." One translation says he was in "great anguish of spirit" (NLT). What is he in anguish about? "One of you will betray me." Any of us who have felt the anguish of betrayal can relate. Someone close to us; someone we trusted; someone we opened our heart to in friendship or love or marriage – that very person stabs us in the back relationally or financially or whatever. We all pick up a few Judases along the way, don't we?

David writes of a painful betrayal in Psalm 41. *"Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me."* (Psalm 41:9) Jesus was human just like us. To have someone so close to him betray him was part of what the Father decreed he suffer to accomplish our redemption. He is our faithful high priest who can sympathize with our weaknesses, including relational betrayal of trust.

*"What you are going to do, do quickly..."* Judas leaves the Upper Room and goes to the authorities. "Now is the time. Quick! He's going to Gethsemane. We shall get him there!" The Pharisees sent out word and a cohort of Roman soldiers was summoned. A cohort was 600, so there were at least a few hundred soldiers along with many others that made up the arresting mob.

While Judas is completing his treachery, in the Upper Room, Jesus speaks to his disciples (known as the Upper Room discourse in chapters 13-17). He institutes the Lord's Supper and they take the bread and the cup of that symbolic meal for the first time. Mark says they sang a hymn and then they made their way to an olive grove garden known as Gethsemane. After arriving, he takes Peter, James, and John and they go a stone's throw away and Jesus prays fervently there. Shortly thereafter, Jesus summons the disciples and tells them, "my betrayer is at hand" (Matthew 26:46).

*"While he was still speaking, there came a crowd, and the man called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He drew near to Jesus to kiss him, but Jesus said to him, "Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?""* (Luke 22:47-48)

He did. Jesus is arrested, a charade of justice follows, and ultimately he was murdered on a cross – a death for which Judas is held complicit. Judas comes to realize this.

*"Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty 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." And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself."* (Matthew 27:3-5)

Acts fills in the gory part of this story. When Judas hung himself, apparently the rope broke and he fell down on some rocks and his bowels split open and spilled out. Yeah, that is in the Bible (Acts 1:18).

But that is not the end of Judas' story. Judas is still living his story. As I said, Jesus spoke judgment over him.

- *Son of destruction* (John 17:12)
- *"The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born."* (Matthew 26:24)

Judas is in hell today. What is he thinking about right now? How does he reflect on the privileges that were his and now the punishment he is enduring?

## **The Tragic Lessons of Judas Iscariot**

### **Spiritual light without authentic faith**

You would think someone who saw and experienced with Jesus all that Judas did, he couldn't help but truly believe in him as Messiah and Lord, right? If only we preached better sermons, fed more poor, defended the resurrection better, all of Northwest Indiana would bow the knee

to Jesus, right? All they need is more light. Better light. More understanding. Was Judas lacking in any of these? No. He had truth without faith. Light without enlightenment. Knowledge without belief.

Judas was a spiritual opportunist. He was with Jesus while it was good, but he became disillusioned and then Jesus was someone to profit from. Judas was in it for what he could get from it. He wanted the benefits of being with Jesus, but he didn't really believe in him.

Judas is exhibit A of what spiritual hypocrisy and pretension looks like. This happens all the time. People jump on the Jesus bandwagon. They like the vibe. They like the sense of things. *I like Bethel Church!* They like being admired for being spiritual. But all the while they don't truly love Christ. They love what comes with Christ. They are spiritual opportunists and I have to ask myself if I am one of them. Jesus talked about the difference.

*"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'" (Matthew 7:21-23)*

We see here that there is the possibility of doing great things for Christ without actually having a saving relationship with him. That is the scary reality. You can be around the real thing, but not have the real thing. You can know about it, talk about it, give the appearance of it, but not actually have it. There are always tares among the wheat and always Judases among Jesus' followers. Here is where Judas' hypocrisy helps us understand what real faith looks like.

### **Judas' hypocrisy shows what authentic faith looks like**

#### **Judas Loved Money; Mary Loved Jesus → Genuine Faith values Christ above all**

Mary poured her expensive perfume on Jesus and Judas was appalled at the waste. The story showed the true nature of Judas and Mary. Judas loved money. Mary loved Jesus.

Judas was a lover of money. He rebuked Mary for gift. He pilfered out of the moneybag. He sold Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. All for money. Is there a lesson in this?

#### **Judas had remorse; Peter had repentance → Genuine faith can and will humbly repent and be restored**

That night was a bad night for both Judas and Peter. Judas betrayed Jesus. Peter denied Jesus. Both were grievous sins. The difference in the men is not the guilt of what they did, but how they responded to it. Both felt guilty. Judas felt remorse and wished he hadn't done it. Peter felt remorse and wished he hadn't done it. However, they responded in completely different manners. Judas responded with more sin and committed self-murder. Peter sought the Lord and was restored.

True Christians will sin and fall and sometimes grievously so. However, a genuine Christian wants that relationship with God restored more than anything else. He or she will seek it with confession and is willing to restore their testimony to others.

I have seen this many times. An apparent Christian will sin and perhaps that sin is found out in some way. Suddenly they are seized with guilt and fear. Out of the woodwork they come. They must meet with me. They must be absolved of guilt from a spiritual leader. They don't want anybody to know. They are in damage control. Eventually the crisis passes, and when it does,

they are no longer anywhere to be seen. Until the next crisis arises. Do they really want Christ? Are they Mary or Judas? Peter or Judas?

How sweet it is to see a Peter – a man or woman who has suffered in a sin or bondage of some kind, knowing their sin has been discovered, going humbly to those affected and seeking to make it right. Humbly they admit their guilt to God and have no desire to hide it anymore. They long to worship freely again. They take steps to change. There is a humble openness about them. That is Peter.

A true Christian has dethroned self and Christ is there as Lord. We want him, and even when we fail him or turn from him, we long for that relationship with him again. Which are you? Judas or Mary? Judas or Peter? Pretender or Follower?

I think if Judas would have responded like Peter in true contrition to Christ, I think he would have been forgiven. Why? As the song says, *Marvelous grace of our loving Lord, grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt.* Where sin abounds, God's grace does much more abound.

There is mercy and grace to be found for the follower of Jesus who wants that relationship restored and made right, even when we look a lot like Judas Iscariot.

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