

Judas Iscariot: The Day a Devil Died

Sovereign Grace Baptist Church

November 13, 2005

Luke 6:12-16

“And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. 13 And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles; 14 Simon, (whom he also named Peter,) and Andrew his brother, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew, 15 Matthew and Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called Zelotes, 16 And Judas the brother of James, and Judas Iscariot, which also was the traitor.”

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How does an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ become a devil? What brings a man from the highest privilege to the lowest depths of hell? There is no easy answer to that question for the presence of moral evil in an initially perfect universe is still a great mystery. The most profound thinkers of all the ages have not been able to penetrate this great mystery. Like Adam in the Garden of Eden, Judas Iscariot fell from his exalted position. We would still like to know, “*Why?*” And, “*How did it happen?*” The facts surrounding the man are few.

We do know that the traitors’ name was Judas, which was a proud and common name in Jewish history. One of the greatest patriots of the Jewish nation was Judas Maccabees. Many years before the birth of Christ he and his brothers led a revolt against foreign oppression to liberate the Jews of his generation. In honor of Judas’ great exploits mothers named their children after him. When the wife of

Simon Iscariot handed their newborn son to him (John 13:2; John 6:71) for the first time, both mother and father were filled with pride. They were of the tribe of Judah. Their son should be honored with the name Judas.

Like other Jewish boys, Judas grew up with the rich tradition of messianic expectations. The Rabbis taught from the *Holy Scriptures* that one-day a Divine Deliverer would come and lead national Israel in a victorious revolt against foreign domination. A new kingdom would be established and Israel would be a great world power. John the Baptist had spoken about the coming kingdom at Bethany beyond the Jordan (John 1:28). Perhaps Judas heard the Baptist preach and his patriotic heart was stirred.

Then one day the news came. The Messiah was present. The kingdom of heaven was at hand. Multitudes flocked to hear the Young Prophet from Galilee, Jesus of Nazareth. Judas went to listen and remained to be numbered with the other apostles (Luke 6:12-16). What attracted Jesus and Judas to one another is not clearly revealed. Nevertheless, several facts emerge from *Scripture*.

First, Judas was a man with financial ability. The *Bible* says that he was the treasurer of the group in that he kept the purse (John 12:5,6). Matthew would have been better qualified to keep the records and count the money, but Judas was respected and trusted enough to be honored with that responsibility. Later, the truth would emerge that Judas was not worthy of the trust because he “*was a thief*”

(John 12:6). Judas was a thief despite the warnings of Christ when He taught “*ye cannot serve God and mammon*” (Matt. 6:24). The Lord also asked, “*what shall it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose one’s life?*” (Matt. 16:26).

Second, Judas was an apostle. He had been empowered to preach the gospel. He had been given authority to heal the sick and cast out devils (Mark 3:14-19). He who had no saving grace could still be a source of blessing to others.

Third, Judas was a man of persuasive reasoning reflected by a scene in the home of Mary of Bethany. Mary had anointed Jesus with a rich ointment. She did this by faith in preparation for the Lord’s date with death (John 12:7). Judas saw the act of love as a waste of precious money and found a way to say so with clever words. “*Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred shillings and given to the poor?*” (John 12:5). When Peter, James, and John and the other disciples heard the remark it struck a note of simple logic in their heart and they too joined in. “*Why this waste?*” they cried, forgetting that it is never a waste to perform spiritual acts of worship.

Fourth, Judas was a man of good reputation. He was above suspicion by the other disciples up to the final hours of his own life. At the Last Supper it was Judas who sat in the place of honor. He reclined near the Lord on the left so they could talk quietly. When Jesus said, “*One of you shall betray me*”, no one even looked at Judas in suspicion (John 13:21).

The composite picture of Judas as an ordained apostle of financial competence, with persuasive verbal abilities and the persona to command personal respect, has compelled some bible students to have compassion for him. More than one religious writer has tried to portray Judas as almost virtuous. Thomas de Quincey in an essay on Judas Iscariot has tried to present him as merely a misguided patriot. Thomas de Quincey argues that Judas actually loved Jesus and only hung himself because his scheme did not materialize for forcing Christ into political leadership against Rome.

Partial evidence to support this view is said to be found in the word used for “*kiss*” in the gospels (Matt. 26:47-50; Mark 14:43-45; Luke 22:47). The word *kiss* is *kataphilein*, which means, “*to kiss fondly and repeatedly*”. It was the custom of that day for a disciple, when he met a Rabbi, to place his hands on the Rabbi's shoulders and to kiss him. When Judas met Jesus in the Garden he kissed him again and again with eyes alighted and a quickened heartbeat. The idea is presented that when Judas kissed Jesus he was kissing him with great excitement believing that he had finally found a way to force the Lord to act. Judas thought that the Lord must use His Divine power to resist arrest and defend Himself. This use of divine power would naturally lead to a national uprising against Rome. But the whole scheme failed.

The main problem with this reconstruction of the mental state and motives of Judas is that it makes the Lord's death an accident and Judas somewhat noble. If the heart of Judas was only mistaken patriotic zeal, that is one thing. If his heart was stained with sin, that is something else.

Other motives have been suggested as to why Judas betrayed Jesus. Christian scholar Mark Rutherford suggests that Judas used his reason in a clear sighted and cool manner to discern that the ministry of Christ was all over. Because Judas foresaw a head-on collision with the Roman authorities he simply arranged to have the Lord arrested, not to have Christ killed, but to have Him taken out of harm's way. Judas sought to protect Jesus before ultimate injury could come to the Master.

Rutherford concludes his discussion on Judas by lamenting that later on, after the crucifixion, and after Judas had committed suicide no witnesses were ever called on Judas' behalf and Judas never told his own story. But perhaps this should have been done. *“What would his friends of Kerrioth have said for him? What would Jesus have said? If he had met Judas with the halter in his hand, would he not have stopped him? Ah! I can see the divine touch on the shoulder, the passionate prostration of the repentant in the dust, the hands gently lifting him, the forgiveness for he knew not what he did, and the seal of a kiss indeed from the sacred lips.”*

Certainly one of the loveliest and most gracious thoughts ever said by any preacher or commentator about Judas was said by the second century Greek teacher and church father, Origen (c. AD 185-254). Origen suggested that as soon as Judas fully realized just what he had done, he rushed to commit suicide in order to meet the Lord in Hades, the place of all the dead, and there beg the Lord's forgiveness.

While all the efforts to redeem the reputation of Judas are thoughtful, there are serious problems with the attempts to find virtue and nobility in the man. First, there are the words of Jesus. In Matthew 26:24 the Lord spoke of the traitor and said, "*It would have been good had he never been born*". In John 6:70 the Christ revealed, "*Have I not chosen you twelve and yet one of you is a devil?*"

Jesus knew which one was a devil. A year before He was arrested Jesus was calling Judas diabolic because "*He knew who should betray Him*" (John 2:24,25; 6:64). Professor A. B. Bruce plainly writes, "*Iscariot was chosen merely to be a traitor, as an actor might be chosen to play the part of Iago*" (Jude 1:4). The *Scriptures* of prophecy were fulfilled. Psalm 41:9, "*Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me.*"

Looking at the motive of betrayal by Judas with a critical eye several possibilities emerge. It may be that Judas was a man who was always on the outside looking in. We have already noticed how Judas was trusted by the other

apostles and was influential over them. But Judas was not among the most intimate of the group as Peter, James, and John. Judas might have felt one reason for this was social prejudice. He was from Kerieth in the district of Jerusalem while the other disciples were from Galilee. There was a natural tension and mistrust between the two people in the geographical locations. Dr. William Barclay comments,

“It is not difficult to see him, even if he had a high place among the Twelve, slowly and unreasonably growing jealous and embittered because others had a still higher place. And it is not difficult to see that bitterness coming to obsess him, until in the end his love turned to hate and he betrayed Jesus.”

There is a second motive that could have driven Judas to betray Jesus and that is simply an insatiable love for money. The *Bible* tells us that love of money is the root of all forms of evil (1 Tim. 6:10). In John 12:1-8 the Scriptures record that Judas carried the money bag. The Greek word is *bastazein*, which could mean, “to embezzle”. To “lift” or “bear” a thing can mean, “to carry it” or it can mean, “to steal” something as in the word “shoplifter”. Perhaps Judas was robbing from the purse. If money was Judas’ motive for the betrayal he sold his immortal soul very cheaply. Thirty pieces of silver is only worth about \$226.80 on today’s market if each piece weighed an ounce.

In the final analysis, the primary influence upon the will of Judas to inflame his inner motive was not spite, jealousy, money, or political ambition but Satan himself. “*Satan*”, says Luke, “*entered into Judas*” (Luke 22:3).

As John tells the story, it was at the Last Supper that the Evil One took final possession of the soul of Judas and he went out into the night to betray the Light of the World (John 13:2; John 6:70).

The ability of Satan to literally possess Judas is a difficult concept to understand but there are some things that help beginning with the fact that the Bible teaches there is another form of life called angels. There are two types of angels: the fallen and the elect (Jude 1:6). Fallen angels, led by Lucifer are called demons. Demons have a fascination with mortals for they desire to possess human bodies.

One-reason demons are not more influential are the prayers of the Lord for His own. Without the prayers of the Lord, Christians would be open to demon infiltration. Judas was not only open to demonic infiltration, he was inhabited by the Ruler of Darkness himself. However, it is possible that Judas was not Satan’s first choice of occupancy.

Luke records an incident where Jesus speaks to Peter saying, “*Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat*” (Luke 22:31). The only thing that kept Simon Peter safe from Satan was the Lord’s

prayer. *“But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not; and when thou art converted strengthen thy brethren”*. Jesus never prayed for Judas the same way He prayed for Peter. In fact, in John 17, the Lord prayed for all of the disciples except one, the Son of Perdition, *“that the Scripture might be fulfilled”* (John 17:12).

In the fullness of time, according to the Sovereign will of God, Jesus was born to bear the sins of the saints. And in the fullness of time, according to the providence of God, Judas was also born to fulfill the *Scriptures*. The *Bible* teaches God works all things according to the counsel of His own will (Eph. 1:11). Individuals are free to be what the Lord enables them to be. Apart from the Lord, individuals are also free to be what the world, the flesh, and the devil wants them to be. Jesus said, You *“have not chosen me but I have chosen you— and one of you is a devil.”*

From a human perspective Judas betrayed Jesus from a mixture of personal motives to include being a misguided patriot and harboring petty bitterness while trying to satisfy an insatiable love for money. These factors were used by Satan to compel Judas to intentionally betray Christ. It was not an irrational response to an isolated emotional situation that caused Judas to become traitorous. Matthew 26:16 says, *“He (Judas) sought opportunity to betray Him”*. Judas sought how he might conveniently betray Christ.

All of this is from a human viewpoint. From a divine perspective Judas betrayed Jesus in order that the *Scriptures* might be fulfilled. In all of this, there is a great mystery for it is not easy to discern where human responsibility and divine sovereignty unite. John F. Kennedy, Jr. once asked the Rev. Billy Graham about this for an interview with *George* magazine. He asked if people were always responsible for their actions or is there a time when the Divine will supersede. Dr. Graham acknowledged that the question delves into a great mystery for both things are true: God is sovereign and men are responsible for what they do and say.

The acceptance of personal responsibility for his actions is manifested in the life of Judas in that he felt remorse. In the end, Judas was not without sorrow and grief. Running back to the Temple with a growing horror, Judas cast the money of betrayal back in the face of the priests (Matt. 27:1-4) while crying with shame, “*I have sinned. I have betrayed innocent blood*”.

*“Thirty pieces of silver burns on the traitor’s brain,
Thirty pieces of silver—oh, it is hellish gain:
I have sinned and betrayed the guiltless,
He cried with a lowered breath,
As he threw them down in the Temple
And rushed to a madman’s death.”*

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William Blane

Temporal death was followed by eternal death. There was no one present to say, *“Son, thy sins be forgiven thee”*. Sometimes repentance comes too late. Sometimes, there is a point of no return. There is an invisible line that can be crossed in which there is no hope of salvation or coming to repentance. Judas crossed the line and he knew it. And so it was that Judas went out and hung himself. When the rope broke he fell upon jagged rocks where his body burst open. *“Truly it would have been better for that man if he had never been born”* (Matt. 26:24 NEB).

The final word on Judas is found in Acts where it is recorded that he went to his own place (Acts 1:25). Judas went from the hallowed place in the Garden of Gethsemane to the hellish place where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched. And the question comes, *“Where is your place? Is it at Gethsemane with Jesus, or in Gehenna with Judas?”*

*“It may not be for silver, it may not be for gold,
But yet by tens of thousands the Prince of Life is sold,
Sold for a godless friendship, sold for a selfish aim,
Sold for a fleeting trifle, sold for an empty name.*

*Sold in the mart of science, sold in the seat of power,
Sold at the shrine of fortune, sold in pleasure’s arbor,
Sold for an awful bargain none but God’s eye can see,
Ponder my soul the question, shall He be sold by thee?*

*Sold! Oh God, what a moment! Stilled is conscience voice;
Sold! And a weeping angel records the fatal choice,
Sold! But the price accepted to a living coal shall turn,
With the pangs of a late repentance deep in the soul to burn.”*

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Heaven or hell. Paradise or perdition—
The choice is made this side of the grave.

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Dr. Herbert Lockyer

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Luke 6:12-16

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- *Luke 22:3 Then entered Satan into Judas surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve.*

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VI. The Acceptance of Personal Responsibility

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- *Acts 1:25 That he [Judas] may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.*

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