



LESSON 10

JUDAS THE TRAITOR

Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?" He spoke of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, for it was he who would betray Him.

JOHN 6:70-71

His name is as infamous as it is notorious. He has been depicted in countless works of art across the centuries, often sulking in the shadows as he plots how to hand over his Lord for a handful of coins. Judas Iscariot. In every mention of his name in the Bible, he is designated a traitor and a betrayer. But not just a betrayer—he is *the* betrayer. Judas spent three years with Jesus, like the rest of the disciples, but in all that time his heart only grew more hateful. His dark story poignantly illustrates the depths to which the human heart can sink.

Judas began like the other disciples. He was just a common man eager to follow the Messiah, whom he clearly assumed would be a political force for the

restoration of Israel. Tragically, though, Judas had no interest in Jesus' priorities and no interest in loving or serving Him. His heart and mind were on other things. Time and again, in spite of many opportunities to turn from his ways, he chose the kingdom of darkness over the kingdom of light.

His life stands as a warning about the stark realities of spiritual coldness, worldly lusts, and hardness of heart. Here was a man who lived in the presence of the Savior and enjoyed the privilege of having direct access to Christ. He was a witness to everything Jesus taught and all the good works that He did. He even knew that Jesus was God—exactly as He had claimed.

Yet Judas never laid hold of the truth by faith, and so he was never transformed. While the other disciples were increasing in faith as sons of God, he was becoming more and more a child of hell. In the end, he remained in unbelief and entered a hopeless eternity. His life is a lesson in tragedy and lost opportunities. He is the epitome of wasted privilege. He is a classic illustration of how the love of money leads to destruction (see 1 Timothy 6:9). He is a vivid example of the deceitfulness and fruitfulness of hypocrisy.

Still, what we find in Judas's story is that God's love always triumphs. At first glance, his betrayal of Jesus appears to be among Satan's greatest triumphs. But what we find instead is that even the worst act of treachery will work toward the divine fulfillment of God's plan. The story of Judas trumpets an indisputable truth: No matter how cunning one's scheme, how cruel one's intent, or how deep one's hatred, God's plan of salvation cannot be thwarted.

STARTING OUT

What initially drew you to follow after Jesus? How has your initial interest in Him progressed or deepened as you have grown closer to Him day by day?

EXPLORING THE STORY

Judas gave up his *life* to follow Jesus full-time. Sadly, he never gave Jesus his *heart*. He was a man who possessed *consuming avarice*, which led to his *cold betrayal* of Jesus, which in turn led to his *bitter end*. You will explore each of these aspects of his life in this section.

Consuming Avarice

Judas's name appears last in every biblical list of apostles (except in Acts 1:13, where it does not appear at all). His surname, Iscariot, is derived from the Hebrew *ish* (meaning "man") and a town named Kerioth. Thus, he was a "man of Kerioth," likely Kerioth-Hezron (see Joshua 15:25), a town in southern Judea. He appears to have been the lone disciple who did not come from Galilee—the outsider of the bunch. Meanwhile, as we know, many of the disciples knew each other as brothers, friends, or working companions prior to meeting Jesus.

The disciples were drawn to Jesus as a person. However, Judas saw Jesus as nothing more than a means to an end. At the start, he was no doubt attracted to what he expected to be the advent of an earthly, political, military, and economic kingdom. Jesus was the obvious fulfillment of the Old Testament messianic promises. He spoke, taught, and lived like no one else. Furthermore, Jesus had powers like no other man. What young, zealous, patriotic Jew *wouldn't* want to join such a leader in overthrowing Israel's Roman oppressors?

Judas and the other disciples shared the expectation that they would be rewarded for following Jesus (see Matthew 19:27). They anticipated material rewards in the here and now, unaware that their greatest reward would be in the age to come (see Luke 18:29–30). Over time, they began to realize that Jesus was not the Messiah they expected. However, rather than feeling disillusioned—as Judas apparently did—the eleven grew to love Jesus even more. Gradually, their love for Christ overcame their worldly ambitions. They grew to embrace His eternal values and teachings. His mission became their own.

By contrast, Judas grew disgruntled with Jesus' mission. For the most part, he hid his disappointment under a blanket of hypocrisy, continuing to act like a devoted disciple while pilfering money (see John 12:6) and seeking opportunities to capitalize on Jesus' prestige. However, his avarice and greed were exposed during a dinner at the home of Simon the Leper in Bethany (see Matthew 26:6). While

"A POUND OF VERY COSTLY OIL"

The term used for *pound* actually indicates a weight around three-fourths of a pound (approximately twelve ounces). *Spikenard* was an oil extracted from the root of a plant grown in India. Since those who were eating reclined at the table, their feet extended away from it, making it possible for Mary to anoint the feet of Jesus with the oil. The act symbolized Mary's humble devotion and love for Him.¹

Jesus was at the table, Mary (the sibling of Martha and Lazarus) "took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil" (John 12:3).

The extravagant act shocked the disciples. Jesus understood it as a joyous expression of worship. Judas saw it as gross excess. He said, "Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii [approximately a year's wages] and given to the poor?" (verse 5). Evidently, his criticism seemed reasonable to the other disciples, for they echoed his indignation (see Matthew 26:8). In truth, Judas was a thief who wanted that money for himself.

Jesus only lightly reprimanded Judas: "Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial" (John 12:7). However, the incident seems to have been a turning point for Judas. He already resented Jesus for not being a political Savior. Now, Jesus' willingness to receive such lavish worship was costing him money that he could have skimmed from their treasury. Judas went to the chief priests and asked, "What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?" (Matthew 26:15). They offered him thirty pieces of silver—the price of a slave (see Exodus 21:32). The contrast is staggering. At the same time that Mary anointed the Lord with overwhelming love, Judas was plotting to betray Him with overwhelming hate.

- Read John 12:1-8. What was Judas's role among the disciples? How did he reveal his avarice—his extreme greed for material wealth—in this story?

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- Read John 15:1–6. Judas chose to live in deceit rather than abide in Christ. What does Jesus say will happen to a person who makes that same choice?

- Read Matthew 6:19–21 and Luke 12:15–21. What warnings did Jesus give about the love of money? What does it mean to lay up treasures in heaven rather than on earth?

- What are some ways that you are laying up treasures in heaven rather than on earth?

Cold Betrayal

Judas, having taken money for the betrayal, joined the other disciples to share in the Passover feast. Before they ate, Jesus washed each man's feet—even Judas's feet. The betrayer let Him do it, unmoved by Jesus' example of humility.

During the meal, Jesus said, "You are clean, but not all of you" (John 13:10b). He then specified, "I do not speak concerning all of you" (verse 18). He then spoke even more plainly: "Most assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me"

(verse 21). Matthew writes that all the disciples (except Judas) "were exceedingly sorrowful" and "each of them began to say to Him, 'Lord, is it I?'" (26:22). Judas, careful to keep up the ruse, chimed in, "Rabbi, is it I?" (verse 25).

However, in his case there had been no sincere self-examination. He asked the question only to keep the focus off himself. John reports that Jesus dipped a piece of bread in the wine and gave it to Judas, signifying he was the betrayer. At this point, "Satan entered him. Then Jesus said to him, 'What you do, do quickly.' . . . Having received the piece of bread, he then went out immediately. And it was night" (John 13:27, 30).

In that moment, the day of salvation closed for Judas. The darkness of sin triumphed in his heart—and Satan moved in. Judas's conspiracy soon came to fruition in the garden of Gethsemane. Jesus had just spent hours pouring out His heart to His Father. Suddenly, Judas arrived with a contingent of people, including "a detachment of troops," and they were carrying "lanterns, torches, and weapons" (John 18:3). This detachment of troops was most likely a Roman cohort—about six hundred men in total.

Jesus did not give Judas the chance to single Him out. "Jesus therefore, knowing all things that would come upon Him, went forward and said to them, 'Whom are you seeking?'" (verse 4). When the cohort answered, "Jesus of Nazareth," He then said, "I am He" (verse 5). Judas had arranged a signal to identify Jesus: "Whomever I kiss, He is the One; seize Him" (Matthew 26:48). However, because

BETRAYED WITH A KISS

In addition to being a special act of respect and affection, the kind of kiss that Judas gave to Jesus was a sign of homage in Middle Eastern culture. Out of the varieties of this kiss (on the feet, on the back of the hand, on the palm, on the hem of the garment), Judas chose the embrace and the kiss on the cheek—the one that showed the closest love and affection, normally reserved for one with whom a person had a close, intimate relationship (such as a pupil for his teacher). Judas could not have chosen a more despicable way to identify Jesus, because he perverted its usual meaning so treacherously and hypocritically.²

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Jesus had been so quick in identifying Himself, the signal was unnecessary. Judas, the cynic and scoundrel, kissed Him anyway (see Mark 14:45). It was the worst kind of treachery, for with it, he profaned Jesus and betrayed his Lord.

- Read John 13:21–30. How did Peter and John react to Jesus' announcement that one of the disciples would betray Him? Why did none of them understand this betrayer was Judas?

- Read 1 Corinthians 11:27–29. Each of the disciples at the Last Supper, with the exception of Judas, engaged in *honest* self-examination. According to Paul, why is this necessary?

- Read 1 Peter 3:10–12. What does Peter say in this passage about not speaking with deceit? What is the promise for those who seek after righteousness?

- David prayed, “Search me, O God, and know my heart” (Psalm 139:23). What are some ways that you engage in regular self-examination and ask God to search your heart?

Bitter End

Judas had handed Jesus over to the authorities. But with the deed done, his conscience suddenly came alive. “Judas . . . was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, ‘I have sinned by betraying innocent blood’” (Matthew 27:3–4a). His remorse was not the same as repentance. He was sorry not because he had sinned but because his sin did not satisfy him as he had hoped.

When Judas tried to return the money to the chief priests and elders, their response was unsympathetic. They had what they wanted—leaving Judas in a hell of his own making. Sadly, Judas did not seek God’s forgiveness or cry for mercy. Instead, “he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself” (verse 5).

Apparently, Judas chose a tree on an overhang above some jagged rocks in a field. Either the rope snapped or the tree branch broke, and Judas fell headlong onto the rocks (see Acts 1:18–19). The Bible’s last word about him is that “he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out” (verse 18). Both Judas’s life and his death were sickening tragedies. He was a child of hell and a son of perdition, and he went “to his own place” (verse 25).

Judas’s betrayal of Jesus brought about the events that led to His death on the cross. It seemed as if hell had finally won. (Jesus’ disciples certainly thought so in the days immediately after Jesus’ death.) But, in truth, Judas’s betrayal signaled the utter defeat for the evil one and all his plans (see Hebrews 2:14–18; 1 John 3:8). The victory was so great that not even the loss of one of the twelve disciples could prevent the gospel from going forward.

A TRAGEDY OF HIS OWN MAKING

When Judas bartered away the life of Christ, he was in effect selling his own soul to the devil. The tragedy of his life was a tragedy of his own making. He ignored the light he had been exposed to for all those years he had spent with Jesus, and thus he relegated himself to eternal darkness. Hypocrites like Judas have no one but themselves to blame for the destruction of their souls.³

After Jesus' resurrection, as the disciples and other followers of Jesus waited for the coming of the Holy Spirit, Peter stood in their midst and proposed they find another to fill Judas's office (see Acts 1:15-22). Two names were put forth, and a man named Matthias was chosen (see verses 23-26). He was a dedicated believer who had been with Jesus and the other apostles "from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up" (verse 22).

Nothing else is known of Matthias. Various traditions say he ministered in Ethiopia, or traveled to Damascus, or remained in Jerusalem. But the Bible is silent about the rest of his actions. What we *can* say is that he also became a powerful witness of Jesus' resurrection—one more ordinary man whom the Lord elevated to an extraordinary calling.

- Read 2 Corinthians 7:8-10. Judas expressed remorse for his actions—but not repentance. How does Paul explain the difference between the two?

- Read 1 John 1:8-9. Judas was remorseful that his betrayal of Jesus did not satisfy him in the way he had hoped but did not seek God's forgiveness for his sins. What does John say that God is "faithful and just" to do when we genuinely repent of our sins?

- Read Colossians 2:13-14. Judas's betrayal of Jesus appeared to be a great victory for Satan. However, what does Paul say Jesus' death accomplished at the cross?

- What stands out to you about the life of Judas Iscariot? What cautions from his story apply to every person who seeks to be a true follower of Jesus?

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CONSIDERING YOUR STORY

Read Hebrews 3:7-14. It is a tragedy that Judas spent some three years in the very presence of Jesus and yet, in all that time, his heart was only growing harder and more hateful.

- Judas's life is a sober reminder that it is possible to closely associate with Jesus and His people and still become hardened by sin. Has there been a time in your life when you rebelled against God or rejected Him? Did you do so openly or hide behind hypocrisy?

- What turned your heart back toward God? How did He use other believers to help you?

- The author of Hebrews instructs us to "exhort one another daily" (verse 13). What are three practical ways that you believe God is using you to encourage others in their faith?

1.

2.

3.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.

Jesus, You know the secret places in my heart where I hang on to grudges, sinful desires, and hurts. I do not want to be a person like Judas who rejects You and grows cold. Thank You for Your patience and Your love. Please turn me around, redirect my desires, and give me a fire for You. Do for me what I cannot do for myself. I ask for this in Your redeeming name. Amen.

1. John MacArthur, author and general editor, *The MacArthur Study Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1997), note on John 12:3.
2. MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, note on Mark 14:44.
3. MacArthur, *Twelve Ordinary Men*, 198.