



from the desk of . . .

Rande Wayne Smith

D.Min., Th.M., M.Div.

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A Love That Never Dies - 4

THE FALL OF JUDAS

Matthew 27:1-10

Each year at Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum (X) in London, 1,000's of visitors are asked to name the person, past or present, real or fictional, they believe is the worst human being ever. Now the individual that has topped the list the most often has been Adolph Hitler. Other names that have been mentioned throughout the years have been: Osama Bin Laden, Idi Amin, Richard Nixon, Margaret Thatcher, & Jack the Ripper.

But as I was looking over the list this past week I was surprised to discover that Judas Iscariot has never even been mentioned. I mean, think about it, this was the man who betrayed Jesus Christ ... the Son of God, the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the Prince of Peace.

His name is synonymous with betrayal. Open up any dictionary & you'll find him defined, (most of the other disciples aren't even mentioned). "Judas Iscariot, the disciple who betrayed Jesus; a traitor or betrayer."

If immortality was Judas' goal he certainly achieved it.

But in his case, immortality wasn't a positive thing. I mean, when was the last time you saw a St. Judas Church? ... And as far as Biblical names go ... I've known individuals who were named Joshua, Nehemiah, Jeremiah, Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Aaron, & Levi ... but we've never heard anyone naming their bouncing baby boy, Judas.

Now some of you might remember that Jesus had a younger brother who was named Judas. (Mark 6:3) But when he wrote the letter that would eventually become a part of our N.T. he shortened his name to Jude. (Jude 1)

Now we don't read the books of 1 & 2 Pete, or 1 & 2 & 3 Jack ... so I wonder why Judas felt the need to shorten his name to Jude? ... My guess it was because he didn't want to be confused with Judas Iscariot.

But who was he? Who was this Judas Iscariot? ... Well, we don't really know all that much about him; we know that his father was Simon Iscariot. (John 13:2)

His surname "Iscariot" was probably a combination of the Hebrew words "ish" & "kerioth" ... which would be translated ... "man of Kerioth." If that's correct, it would make him the only Judean among the disciples.
(The rest were Galileans.)

Judas may have been the most trusted disciple, & he apparently had some business understandings ... because he was chosen to be the treasurer of the group. (John 12:6)

Other than that ... everything else that Scripture tells us about Judas is negative. Well, last week we looked at "The Fall Of Peter" ...

this morning it's "The Fall Of Judas."

Listen now to Good News as recorded by Matthew, to you who have gathered here for worship at C.C.R.M.

Within your hearing comes the Word of the Lord ...

Early in the morning all the chief priests and the elders made their plans against Jesus to put him to death. They put him in chains, led him off, and handed him over to Pilate, the Roman governor.

When Judas, the traitor, learned that Jesus had been condemned, he repented and took back the thirty coins to the chief priests and elders. "I have sinned by betraying an innocent man to death!" he said.

"What do we care about that?" they answered. "That is your business!"

Judas threw the coins down in the Temple and left; then he went off and hanged himself.

The chief priests picked up the coins and said, "This is blood money, and it is against our Law to put it in the Temple treasury." After reaching an agreement about it, they used the money to buy Potter's Field, as a cemetery for foreigners.

That is why that field is called "Field of Blood" to this very day.

Then what the prophet Jeremiah had said came true: "They took the thirty silver coins, the amount the people of Israel had agreed to pay for him, and used the money to buy the potter's field, as the Lord had commanded me." (Matthew 27:1-10)

May the Lord grant that we may engage in contemplating the mysteries of His Heavenly wisdom with really increasing devotion, to His glory and to our edification. Amen

For 2 people who don't watch that much TV, Kathy & I have gotten hooked on a show this year ... "Timeless." (X) It's a drama, where a history professor, a scientist, & a soldier, attempt to stop a "bad guy" from changing the course of history through time travel. And because we both love history, & the 1st episode was about Abraham Lincoln's assassination ... we got sucked in.

We talk about that from time-to-time; Kathy is intrigued with the idea of going back in time to see famous persons in history. And I guess I am too.

But, if I could travel back to anyplace or time ... my 1st stop would be The Upper Room,
the last night of Jesus' earthly life.

To be sitting around the table with the disciples at the very 1st Communion service ... with Jesus Himself serving the elements! ... Wow! But to be honest, that wasn't an evening totally without stress.

Let's try to imagine the scene.
Matthew, who was there, describes it for us.

"When it was evening, Jesus & the 12 disciples sat down to eat. During the meal Jesus said, 'I tell you, one of you will betray me.'" (Matthew 26:20-22)

Okay, let's stop right there. ... Imagine being one of the 12 especially picked disciples of Jesus. You've had some incredible experiences in the past 3 years. You have, for all intents & purposes, turned your life over to Him. You've learned to completely depend on & trust one another. You're a tight band of followers.

And now, as you're preparing to celebrate the Festival of Unleavened Bread in Jerusalem ... which all of you, including Jesus, have been looking forward to. Jesus Himself said ... "I have wanted so much to eat this Passover meal with you." (Luke 22:15)

This is a moment of deep spiritual reflection.

And in the middle of this holy experience, Jesus blurts out ... "I tell you, one of you will betray me." ...

Imagine. What would your reaction be? ...

Matthew tells us that "the disciples were very upset."

But then something interesting happens ... they all began to ask if He meant them! "Is it me? Is it me?" To which Jesus responds ... "One who dips his bread in the dish with me will betray me. The Son of Man will die as the Scriptures say he will, but how terrible for that man who will betray the Son of Man! It would have been better for that man if he had never been born!"

And then Matthew records ... "Judas, the traitor, spoke up, 'Surely, Teacher, you don't mean me?'" (Matthew 26:23-25)

"Surely, Teacher, you don't mean me?" ... Those are the words of Judas as he was about to betray Jesus.

What was going through his mind when he said that? ...

Because he was one of the original 12, Judas would have been present for all those amazing things Jesus did ... all the signs & wonders He performed. (John 20:30)

He was present when Jesus fed the 5,000 (Mark 6:44) & the 4,000. (Mark 8:8-9) He was there to distribute the bread & fish, & to gather up the leftovers.

In fact, Judas must have done some amazing things himself, because we read in Scripture that there was the time when the disciples "went out & preached that people should turn away from their sins. They drove out many demons, & rubbed olive oil on many sick people & healed them." (Mark 6:12-13) And Judas part of that.

Judas witnessed the power of God at work!

And we can't forget that Judas was familiar with Jesus' teaching. He was present to hear "The Sermon On The Mount." He heard Jesus' teaching with parables ... & even had their meaning explained to him. (Luke 8:9)

I wonder if Judas recognized himself in the Parable about the Sower? Was Jesus talking about him when He said ... "Some people are like the seeds that fall along the path; as soon as they hear the message,
Satan comes & takes it away." (Mark 4:15)

So, from all outward appearances, anyone who observed Judas would certainly think that he must be a very "religious" man. But, Judas' life is a **warning** that it's possible to spend lots of time in Jesus' presence, hearing the best of sermons, & even witnessing an abundance of miracles ... & still **perish**.

It's an encouragement to do what Peter, aware of his own weakness, urged his readers to do ...

"So then, my friends, try even harder to make God's call & his choice of you a permanent experience; if you do so, you will never abandon your faith. In this way you will be given the full right to enter the eternal Kingdom of our Lord & Savior Jesus Christ." (2 Peter 1:10-11)

But ... & as is always the case in Scripture, the word "but" is significant ... "but" Judas was not in love with Jesus. He never got to that place in the relationship.

His "religion" was all about him. It existed solely for his benefit. It was a place where he had power & authority & recognition ... & even access to money.

Judas loved what he could gain by hanging around Jesus.

Sadly, there are "Judas" kind of people still actively involved with "the **church**" & "religion." They really don't **love** Jesus ... & it's because they really don't **know** Him.

They love the building ... they love the liturgy ... they love the opportunity to serve. They love going to church ... but do not love Jesus. "They hold to the outward form of our religion, but reject its real power." (2 Timothy 3:5)

Now, let's take this a step further. Judas betrayed Jesus. He sold Him out for 30 pieces of silver. That's his legacy. In fact, each time he's mentioned in Scripture, we're reminded of that.

"One of Jesus' disciples, Judas Iscariot - the one who was going to betray him - said" (John 12:4)

And when Matthew, Mark, & Luke list the 12 disciples ... Judas is always the very last one. Matthew & Mark write ... "& Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus."

(Matthew 10:4; Mark 3:19) And Luke puts it this way ...

"& Judas Iscariot, who became the traitor." (Luke 6:16)

Judas was a betrayer; a traitor.
His name is a byword for disloyalty.

The "Judas Kiss" (Luke 22:48) ...
speaks of treachery & deceit.

Now, there are theologians who try to cut Judas a break. They attempt to paint him as a nice guy who was simply "misunderstood".

Years ago, there was a popular musical entitled "Jesus Christ Superstar" (X) & it depicted Judas as actually a tragic figure who was dissatisfied with the direction Jesus was going & tried to save Him from His self-destructive ways.

According to that version Judas meant well, but he ended up getting Jesus killed anyway. In the musical Judas was a hero; he was a nice guy who just didn't understand what God had in mind.

But Judas was not a hero, & he certainly wasn't a good guy. Judas wasn't a man we could trust. And we get a real sense of that in a story from John's Gospel.

Jesus is visiting His dear friends Martha, Mary, & Lazarus in Bethany. Jesus, Lazarus, & the disciples are sitting at the table. Martha is serving them dinner.

"Then Mary took a whole pint of a very expensive perfume made of pure nard, poured it on Jesus' feet, & wiped them with her hair. The sweet smell of the perfume filled the whole house.

One of Jesus' disciples, Judas Iscariot - the man who was going to betray him - said, 'Why wasn't this perfume sold for 300 silver coins & the money given to the poor?'

He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief. He carried the money bag & would help himself from it." (John 12:3-6)

Judas was a thief & a liar. He was manipulative & selfish. So, the question that I'm often asked is ...

Why in the world would Jesus, who must have known all that, pick Judas to be a disciple? (John 6:64) ...

Well, the answer is found in the prayer Jesus prayed in the Upper Room ... "While I was with them, (the 12 disciples), I kept them safe by the power of your name, the name you gave me. I protected them, & not one of them was lost, except the man who was bound to be lost - so that the scripture might come true." (John 17:12)

Judas "was the man who was bound to be lost" ... He was chosen "so that the scripture might come true."

Jesus chose Judas to **fulfill prophecy**. He chose him because of the kind of man he was. Judas was a nasty man ... a self-centered & self-serving man. Judas was a thief. And he was a thief before he betrayed Jesus.

Judas had already decided his destiny. God chose him to fulfill a prophecy from the O.T. concerning someone who would betray the coming Messiah.

"Even my close friend, the one I trusted most, the one who shared my food, has turned against me." (The Psalms 41:9)
 But, even so ... it must have broken Jesus' heart when Judas stepped out of the arresting mob,
 & kissed Him on the cheek. (Matthew 26:49)

Now, let me be honest with you ... it was at this point in my sermon preparation that I got stuck. I frankly didn't know what to do with the statement ...

"When Judas, the traitor, learned that Jesus had been condemned, he repented & took back the 30 silver coins to the chief priests & the elders."

Judas repented? ... The theological meaning of "repent" is "to turn around & go in a different direction."

Okay, so what did Matthew mean when he wrote that Judas repented? Did he go from being a selfish thief & turn his life over to Jesus? Did he become a faithful witness to what The Holy Spirit can do in a person's life?

I was curious as to how some of the other Bible translations interpreted the word Matthew used ... μεταμεληθείς. Instead of "repent" I found ...

"gripped with remorse" ... "was sorry for" ...
 "changed his mind" ... "regretted."

Now although the Greek word that's routinely translated as "repent" is frequently found in the N.T. the word that Matthew uses here is a different one.

The word used here is found only one other time in the N.T. When Jesus told the Parable about the father who asked his 2 sons to work in the vineyard, the older son said "no" ... but later μεταμεληθεὶς ... "changed his mind." (Matthew 21:29) The word normally used in Scripture when talking theologically about repentance is καταλλαγὴ ... which we translate as "reconciled."

So, what's the difference between "changed his mind" & "reconciled"? ... This is where we need to compare the stories of Peter & Judas.

Did Peter betray Jesus? ... Yes he did, 3 times. And the betrayal so crushed Peter that he didn't think he'd ever be forgiven by Jesus.

Now Judas was also crushed by his act of betrayal. He returned to the chief priests & elders, threw the money at them, & said ...

"I have sinned by betraying an innocent man to death."

But, "then he went off & hanged himself."

Peter was forgiven ... Judas was not. What's the difference? ... The answer is found in Paul's letter to the Church in Corinth. "For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, but worldly grief produces death." (2 Corinthians 7:10)

The difference between Peter & Judas was the difference between **Godly** grief & **worldly** grief.

Judas experienced grief ... but it was a worldly kind of grief. He was sorry, he regretted, he was remorseful ... but he really didn't want to change who he was & be reconciled to Jesus. And so his grief led to death ...
a tragic & miserable death. (The Acts 1:18)

Peter ... on the other hand ... experienced godly grief. He didn't like who he'd become. He didn't like what he'd done. And he would have given anything to change all that. So, when Jesus offered him forgiveness ...
Peter graciously grabbed hold of it.

He repented, in the true meaning of that word. He determined that he was never going to be that man again. He determined he would never betray Jesus ever again. And Peter's repentance led to salvation ...
a life without regret.

The sad reality is that Judas hung himself even before Jesus was sentenced. Before Pilate finished questioning Jesus, Judas was dead. Before Barabbas was released, Judas was dead. Before Jesus was whipped, Judas was dead. Before the crown of thorny branches was pushed onto Jesus' head, Judas was dead.
Before they nailed Jesus to the cross, Judas was dead.

The real tragedy is that when Jesus looked down from the cross at those who had mocked Him,
& spit on Him, & slapped Him, & struck Him.

When Jesus saw those who had beat Him, & had jammed that painful thorny crown deep into His forehead, & nailed Him to the cross. When Jesus looked at the mob & cried out ... "Forgive them, Father!

They don't know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34)

Judas was already dead by his own hand.

And so the most important thing that Judas missed was the **forgiveness of Jesus Christ**. And that forgiveness would have even been available to him!

"The Lord does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants all to turn away from their sins." (2 Peter 3:9)

Just as it was Judas' decision to betray Jesus, so it was Judas' choice to die unrepentant & go to Hell. True repentance brings forgiveness. (1 John 1:9)

And forgiveness is dependent solely on the grace of God.

Grace has been defined as ... God's Riches At Christ's Expense. And surely Judas needed grace as much, if not more than the rest of us.

And the saddest part of the story is that Judas came so close to receiving it. Actually, there are 3 things that are required from us in order to experience the forgiveness of God:

- **acknowledging** our sin
- **remorse** for our sin
- **accepting** the forgiveness offered, through faith

How close did Judas come?

"I have sinned by betraying an innocent man to death!"

He acknowledged his sin. Judas didn't try to justify himself or offer up excuses for what he'd done. He didn't try to rationalize his guilt.

He said ... "I have sinned!"

We're also told that Judas was "gripped with remorse" ... "was sorry for" ... "changed his mind" ... "regretted." So he "took back the 30 silver coins to the chief priests & the elders."

Now I'm sure all of us have felt remorseful over some particular wrong in our life at one time or another ... but usually only after we've been caught. We're like David who cried out ... "I have sinned against the LORD." (2 Samuel 12:13) But he only said that after Nathan had confronted him with his adultery & murder.

And yet even with Judas' acknowledgement of his sin, & his remorsefulness, he still couldn't bring himself to ask for forgiveness. And while 2 out of 3 might be good for Anthony Rizzo of the Cubs, or Todd Frazier of the White Sox ...

it doesn't cut it when it comes to eternity. (Matthew 5:48)

Now there are 1,000's upon 1,000's of people who "know" that "everyone has sinned & is far away from God's saving presence." (Romans 3:23)

They know that, & they're remorseful; they feel really bad about their sin. But for some reason they just can't bring themselves to seek forgiveness from Christ.

Who knows what's holding them back? ... Maybe it's pride or stubbornness ...

but they don't have to hang themselves because of it.

3 days after Jesus & Judas died ... Jesus rose again ... but Judas was still dead. And as Jesus appeared to the disciples after His resurrection He made a statement that would never apply to Judas.

"It was late that Sunday evening, & the disciples were gathered together behind locked doors ... then Jesus came & stood among them. 'Peace be with you,' he said."

(John 10:19)

Judas missed **peace**. He lived without it ... & he died without it. Actually, this is one of my favorite of Jesus' promises, (which was made just hours before the betrayal). ... "Peace is what I leave with you; it is my own peace that I give you. I do not give it as the world does.

Do not be worried & upset; do not be afraid." (John 14:27)

My friends, the Good News is this ... we don't have to die in our sins or for our sins. Jesus has done that for us ... once & for all. He has given us forgiveness & peace & The Holy Spirit. His is ... "A Love That Never Dies."

MARANA THA