

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (20-3-1994 Guisborough Evangelical Church)

Judas

Acts 1:15-26

Additional Bible Reading: Matthew 27:1-10; John 12:3-6

### Introduction

In our Bible reading, the death of Judas Iscariot necessitates a replacement disciple to be found, and with God's guidance, Matthias is chosen to replace him. We are going to stop and learn some lessons from the life of Judas before carrying on with our study of the early church.

Judas is a man abhorred by all history. One of the most terrible ways to describe a person is to call him a "Judas", one who has sunk to the depths. There were times in the past when churches forbade Christian parents to give their children this name. Judas was the traitor, and the world hates treachery. It excuses and leniently deals with sexual sins, even murder in certain circumstances, self-will and violence. But traitors receive no mercy at the bar of public opinion. The betrayal of a friend or of country is not forgiven or forgotten.

Going to deal first of all with some of the problems people raise about the story. There are three marked differences between Luke's account and Matthew's account of the end of Judas. Independent material has clearly been used, but though different, it is not contradictory. The three differences are (a) how Judas died, (b) who bought the field, and (c) why it is called the Field of Blood.

Firstly the manner in which Judas died – according to Matthew he went away and hanged himself. But Luke says he fell headlong, his body burst open and his intestines spilled out (Acts 1:18). Augustine was the first to deal with this problem, and concluded that after hanging, the body fell headlong (because of the rope or the branch breaking). The Greek word translated "fell headlong", can also mean "swelled up". Either way, the body was ruptured.

The question of who bought the field – Matthew says that Judas threw the betrayal money into the Temple, and the priests used that money to buy the potters field. Luke says Judas bought it. So who bought it? Well, both did. The priests acted and bought the field, but with Judas's money. By law, that money was considered to be Judas's and to have been used by him in the purchase.

Why was it called the Field of Blood? Matthew says it was because it was bought with blood money, but Luke does not say this, and he implies Judas' blood was spilled there. Evidently different traditions had developed among the people in Jerusalem about how the field got its name. But these independent accounts of Judas' death are not incompatible.

Then we come across the problem of how the disciples chose Judas' successor – by casting lots. Should we still use this practice? Some have, down through church history. But it is not a method for us to use now because of the coming of the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

Also, were the disciples wrong to choose Matthias? Did they really need to choose a replacement when obviously the Lord had chosen Paul? Was Paul not the twelfth disciple in reality? But Paul did not have the qualifications which Peter laid down – that the twelfth disciple must be someone who had been with Christ from the time of John's baptism till the Ascension. There is no hint that the choice was a mistake. Also, it is accepted that Paul's apostleship was unique in character.

Now, having dealt with these issues some people like to raise, let us get down to considering the lessons that need to be learnt from the life of Judas.

#### The immediate cause of Judas's betrayal

There has been much speculation about the cause of Judas's betrayal. Some say he was disappointed in Jesus for not being the kind of Messiah he was expecting. But generally it is agreed that the real cause was covetousness and avarice. He was materialistic at heart, and money was of supreme importance in his life. There were clues to this even before the betrayal. He was annoyed with the waste of Mary's expensive perfume. John's account tells us Judas did not care for the poor, but he was a thief, and he would have helped himself to the proceeds of the sale of the perfume, given the chance. Then, for the price of a slave, 30 pieces of silver, he was prepared to sell the best of masters and send Him to His death.

How Judas had been warned of this very sin in the ministry of Jesus. Judas must have heard Jesus warn His disciples, **Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth... Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also** (Matthew 6:19,21). **No man can serve two masters... You cannot serve God and Mammon** (Matthew 6:24). **Beware of covetousness. Your life does not consist in the abundance of things you possess** (Luke 16:15). Jesus told the parable of the rich fool to illustrate the point. **You fool – this night your soul will be required of you** (Luke 16:21). **Do not worry about what you will eat or what you will drink... Your heavenly father knows that you need all of these things. Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you** (Matthew 6:31-33).

Not only here, but also elsewhere in the Bible is clear teaching about materialism, with life dominated by riches and possessions. **When herds and flocks multiply and silver and gold is multiplied, men's hearts are lifted up, they become proud and forget God and all he has done** (Deuteronomy 8:13-14). **People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap... For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs** (1 Timothy 6:9,10). **Godliness with contentment is great gain** (1 Timothy 6:6). **Keep your lives free from the love of money. Let your conduct be without covetousness, and be content with such things as you have. For he himself has said 'I will never leave you nor forsake you'** (Hebrews 13:5).

Besides the example of Judas, there are other Bible characters whose lives demonstrate the danger of greed and covetousness, e.g. Achan, Gahazi, Ahab (whose greed led to murder), Ananias and Sapphira (whose greed made them lie to God). And this message is so relevant to the present generation. While God and spiritual things recede into the background, material possessions and money and status receive

corresponding increase in importance. The love of money, more than any other sin, withers up hearts, blights them and hardens them. How much exploitation, vice, neglect, violence, cruelty is attributable to greed and avarice.

TV adverts, everyday conversation and common values all reflect this and in turn feed this avarice, greed, covetousness. It hooks and possesses people, acting like a drug. Lives revolve around it. It is one of the Devil's chief weapons. It is found among the poor with nothing, and among the rich with everything. It dominates their interests, thoughts, ambitions, and dictates their standards.

There is a warning here too for Christians. Sadly, many Christians have been blighted by the love of money. Gain and profit has taken the place of the Lord in the life. Quickly, standards fall, commitment declines, and testimonies are ruined. The church and its work recede in their estimation. All the while, the Christian makes excuses – “I have my family to think of”, “It's for a rainy day”, “I must keep up my position”.

#### Privileges, knowledge and experience – yet unconverted and untouched by grace

As we look at the total story of Judas, we find a solemn warning. It does not matter how many privileges, how much knowledge, and how many experiences a person has, it is still possible for them to remain unconverted, and untouched by the grace of God. Judas was privileged indeed. He was personally called by the Lord, lived in closest intimacy with Him for three years, a friend of Peter and all the others. He had given up everything for the Lord's sake, he had heard all the sermons, seen the miracles, he himself had been a preacher, had power over devils. He had seen Christ's perfect example, His perfect innocence – there was none better to learn from.

But his heart was untouched by all the privilege and activity and service. In fact, he got worse. He descended more and more into degradation and shameless sin. His real character is described in three terms. “Devil” (John 6:70), “thief” (John 12:4), and “son of perdition” (John 17:12).

When a man is touched by divine influences, he reacts in one of two ways. It either changes him for the better – e.g. Peter, who became the man of rock, and fiery John, who became the apostle of love. Or, he reacts and becomes embittered, hardened and corrupted, like Judas, who stooped to the lowest a man can get. The same fire, which softens wax, also hardens clay. Air nourishes the growing plant, but corrupts and destroys the cut flower. Privilege can be a blessing – or it can be a curse. E.g. growing up in a Christian home can bring untold blessing, or it can produce the swing of the pendulum in the opposite direction. “From the best home to the wildest sin”.

For Judas, there was worse to follow. Luke and John both tell us Satan entered into him (Luke 22:3; John 13:2). He was not just tempted by the Devil, but possessed by him. He sought out the chief priests and the Temple guard to betray Jesus. They were delighted, a bargain was struck and a price agreed. They did not even have to persuade a reluctant Judas. He took the initiative. All the pleadings and warnings of Jesus had no effect. At the Last Supper, Judas occupied the place to Jesus' left, the place for the most honoured guest. Jesus handed him the sop – a mark of special honour. This was a token of love and esteem and final plea to Judas. But it had no

effect. Judas went straight out with the intention of putting his plan into action immediately.

In the Garden of Gethsemane there was further evidence of his wickedness and duplicity. He identified Jesus with a kiss. The Greek word used for kiss is not the word used for a customary greeting, but the word for a lover's kiss. The ultimate irony. He betrayed Jesus to His death. There were terrible things in store for Jesus that day – the hatred of the priests, the clamour of the mob, the brutality of the soldiers, the cowardice of Pilate, but the worst of all must have been the betrayal by His beloved and cherished disciple.

Even Judas's final end is a warning to us. Judas repented too late. Indeed it does not seem it was repentance unto salvation. Late repentance is not often genuine. It is possible to feel sins, to be sorry about them, have strong feelings of guilt, be disturbed in conscience, distressed in mind – yet not truly repent from the heart. That late repentance may only be prompted by a sense of present danger or fear of death. But the Holy Spirit may not have done a work in the heart, and that man enters the presence of his maker unprepared and unforgiven.

What a solemn lesson to us all. A man can have enormous privileges. A man may have made a profession of faith, and may move in the best of company. A man may be active in Christian service. But all the time his heart may not be right with God. He may go to great lengths in religion, but still be without grace. He knows the truth in his head, but still has love of sin in the heart. There is no certain sanctity merely through position, office or dress. **Search me, O God, and know my heart... See if there is any wicked way in me** (Psalm 139:23,24).

How little comfort ungodliness brings at the last. Sin is the hardest of masters despite its fair promises. Its pleasures are only for a season. Its wages are sorrow, remorse, and finally utter ruin. **Be sure your sin will find you out** (Numbers 32:23). Sin and the sinner will meet and have a bitter reckoning – here and hereafter. It would be better not to have been born than to live without faith, die without grace, and then enter eternal ruin.

N.B. Judas was fully responsible for his actions. He is not to be excused as an instrument of God, whose actions were foretold in the Old Testament. **The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born** (Mark 14:21). John Calvin, for all his emphasis on the sovereignty of God, said “Judas may not be excused on the grounds that what befell him was prophesied, since he fell not through compulsion of prophecy but through wickedness of his own heart.”

#### The message of Judas to us all

Let us learn about ourselves, the deceitfulness of the human heart, the shame and the depths to which sin can drag us. No wonder Augustine prayed, “Lord save me from that wicked man – myself”. Do I know a true heart conversion? Have I truly repented? Repented of covetousness and avarice? In reference to this message, has my repentance touched my wallet and my chequebook? As a Christian, have I

consecrated all my possessions to the Lord? Everything I own is only mine on trust from the Lord.

Watch and pray. Do not dally with the Devil or trifle with sin. The strongest Christian is the one who feels his weakness and prays **Hold me up and I shall be safe** (Psalm 119:117).