

Warning from Judas Iscariot

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Three services

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This is message #2 in our list of six messages based on a series by Rev. Richard Pfeil called "Walking with Those Who Walked with Jesus." Last week we looked at the life and ministry of The Apostle Peter.

One of the things I have added is a "Quickie Quiz" of six questions concerning the life of each of the disciples. Last week we took a quick quiz on Peter. This morning we look at the life of Judas Iscariot. Now you can earn points with a correct answer. Here is the first question: Eleven disciples, but not Judas, were from the same region. Which region or city was it? ANSWER: Galilee. Write down 5 points if you got that. (2) What act of affection did Judas use to betray Jesus? ANSWER: He kissed him. You get 10 points for a correct answer on that. (3) How did Judas die? ANSWER: He hanged himself. That was worth fifteen points. (4) What special position did Judas have? ANSWER: He was the treasurer for the group. That's good for twenty points. (5) How many pieces of silver were paid to Judas for betraying Jesus? ANSWER: Thirty. Add 25 points to your score if you got it. (6) What was the name of the man chosen to replace Judas? ANSWER: Matthias. If you knew that, you just earned thirty points. Now if you have a total of fifty or more points, please let me know at the door today.

I think it is only fair to note that from the disciples' viewpoint Judas had some good qualities. First of all, Judas was the treasurer of the group. What kind of a person do groups make a treasurer? They want to choose people who have been around, have some business sense, and can be trusted.

In John 6, where Jesus shares the message in Capernaum about being the bread of life, many people grumbled about the message and got up and left. From that time on many of his followers turned back and no longer followed him. But the Twelve, including Judas, stayed. Jesus even asked them, "You do not want to leave too, do you?" And Simon Peter answered him saying, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

And Judas took part in the ministry of the Word and healing. John 11 tells us of the time that Jesus went back to Judea because of Lazarus being so ill, and the disciples questioned it because the Jews had tried to stone him there. But Jesus was determined to go, and the disciples went with him, despite a warning from Thomas who said, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

Matthew 10 reveals that Judas was also part of the twelve disciples whom Jesus called to himself and gave authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.

So what happened? How can one who was that kind of disciple and follower of Jesus fall to the depths of betrayal? You have to be on your guard. There are pitfalls all around whether you are a Christian or not. Never underestimate the presence and lure of evil in this world. What happened to Judas Iscariot should serve as a warning to all of us.

A person needs to repent of sin and confess it. Otherwise, it may spring up to destroy you. That's what it did with Judas. In John's Gospel, chapter 12, John reports that Judas complained about an expensive perfume being used by Mary on Jesus' feet. Judas wanted to know why that perfume, worth about a year's wages, was not sold so that the money could be given to the poor. John said that Judas did not say this because he really cared about the poor. John said that Judas was a thief, and that as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

This love of money seems to have been the main motivation when he agreed to betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. He may have fooled a lot of people, but he did not fool John and he did not fool Jesus. The Son of God indicated on a couple of occasions that there was something very wrong with one of his disciples.

Things eventually came to a head. The betrayal of Jesus by Judas is recorded in all four Gospels, but different writers sometimes stressed different details. That really adds authenticity that it really happened. John gives us his version starting in John 13:18-30, where Jesus predicted his betrayal. He said, "I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill the Scripture: He who shares my bread has lifted up his heel against me. I am telling you now before it happens so that when it does happen you will believe that I am he. I tell you the truth, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me. After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified 'I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray me.'"

"His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant. One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved (probably John), was reclining next to him. Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, 'Ask him which one he means.'"

"Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, 'Lord, who is it?' Jesus answered, 'It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.' Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon. As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him."

"What you are about to do, do quickly" Jesus told him, but no one at the table understood why Jesus said this to him. Since Judas had charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the Feast, or to give something to the poor. As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night." Soon after that Judas led a group of people with weapons to a place where Jesus had often met with the disciples, betrayed him, and Jesus was taken away.

There is strong evidence that it was money that lead Judas astray. Jesus had warned against thinking that one could serve God and money. Money was too important in Judas' life, and in pursuing it the way he did, it ruined him.

Greed destroyed Judas, and it has the power to destroy us also. It is amazing what some people will do for money. There is a book that was written called Are You Normal About Money? What surprised the author is the length to which people are willing to go for money. One study showed that 21% would swallow a worm for \$300. A total of 59% were willing to shave their head for \$10,000. It also showed that about 60% would commit adultery for one million dollars.

But money exerts an evil influence in a lot of other ways. Some people wreck their health in their attempts to acquire great wealth. Some neglect their families. Some cheat on their taxes or on giving their employer decent efforts to earn their wages. We could give a lot more examples, but I don't think it is necessary. But you can discover a lot of crimes if you follow the money trail. To sum it up, if you are willing to compromise moral and spiritual principles to gain wealth, then money is too important in your life. It can become a kind of god which controls you. The interesting thing is it often leads to committing other serious sins. The police would tell you that a desire for money often leads to robbery or even murder. In Judas' case, he went and hung himself.

Those outside of the church accuse God of setting Judas up to be destroyed. I don't agree; Judas bears full responsibility for what he did. There was another way. Mankind is capable of doing some terrible things, but no matter how bad they are, God's grace is greater. Jesus forgave Peter despite the fact that that Peter denied him three times. Jesus forgave Paul who had arranged for Christians to be imprisoned and even put to death. I have to believe Jesus could have forgiven Judas also, if Judas had confessed his sin and asked Jesus to pardon him.

The Lord was bestowing forgiveness even at his crucifixion when he forgave the one thief. Yes, Judas felt remorse, and he tried to change things by returning the money, but the chief priests would not accept it. He tried to change the wrong that had been done his way, but he needed to do it the Lord's way. 1 John 1:5 says this: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse and purify us from all unrighteousness."

Today, with sadness, we remember what happened to Judas Iscariot. May we also remember the warning we have received from his life. Amen.