

“Why Did Judas Betray Jesus?”

Matthew 26:47-56; 27:1-5

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor
Smoke Rise Baptist Church
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Why did Judas betray Jesus? Did greed motivate him to do it? Did he think that thirty pieces of silver could meet some needs in his life that Jesus could not? Did a desire for money drive him to be unfaithful to Jesus?

Did Judas seize this opportunity to force Jesus to become an insurgent that would lead the masses to rebel against Rome? Was Judas angry because Jesus had not met his expectations of becoming a militant Messiah? Did he think that turning Jesus over to the authorities would compel the Lord to act as a courageous revolutionary and use his “Messianic” powers? According to some scholars, Matthew hints at this when he mentions the kiss that Judas planted on Jesus’ cheek in the Garden of Gethsemane. Matthew indicates that Judas affectionately and repeatedly kissed Jesus that night as if he had done something good. It was as if Judas was saying through his actions, “Now Jesus will show you what he can do!” as he stepped back with expectant pride waiting on Jesus to begin the revolution. Was this Judas’ motive?

Or was Judas driven by ambition? Did he sense that the followers of Jesus were ready to lead an insurrection that he knew would fail, so he cast his lot with the Sadducees out of caution and compromise?

Was Judas a puppet that was fulfilling prophecy? Was he born to become the despised villain in a great tragedy? Was his betrayal planned before his birth, a despicable deed over which he had no control?

I lean toward the second option. I think Judas misunderstood Jesus, the Kingdom of God and how the kingdom would “come on earth as it is in heaven.” Like most believers of his generation, he believed the Kingdom of God would revolve around palaces and plenty and was anxious to claim both. Could it be that he was tired of following an itinerant preacher, living under oppression and getting by with so little? Was he ready for change and not beyond manipulating it? Was this what drove him to cash in his friendship with the most remarkable man he ever met?

“What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?” Judas asked the chief priests. They offered thirty pieces of silver and he led them to Jesus while he was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. To his dismay, Jesus did not resist arrest but went compliantly with the authorities. When Judas realized that Jesus was going to be crucified, “he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priest and elders. ‘I have sinned,’ he said, ‘for I have betrayed innocent blood.’ ‘What is that to us?’ they replied. ‘That’s your responsibility.’ So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself” Matthew 27:3-5.

What are the lessons we need to learn today from this tragic story? I can think of several and the first is this. **Judas teaches us that good people can do bad things.**

I think Judas was a good person as his name implies, “one worthy to be praised.” I believe Jesus chose Judas because he saw qualities and traits in him that he needed in order to do his work. Evidently, Judas balanced the team of disciples and made them

more complete. However, somewhere along the way Judas' thinking became skewed and he made a horrible decision.

Surely you can relate to Judas. Who among us has not made bad decisions that imposed heavy costs upon others and us? I know I have.

The story of Judas also teaches us that some people want to reconsider their decisions when they see the devastating results of their actions. "Wickedness always brings more tragedy than it proposes," wrote George Buttrick. This is why many try to turn back the clock and unravel the consequences.

Judas certainly did. Something went wrong, horribly wrong and when he realized it, he wanted to undo it. He took the money that he had been paid and threw it at the feet of those that paid him. It was too late, though. There was no grace period for reconsideration. The catastrophic results could not be altered.

Wouldn't it be nice if the three-day "grace period" that accompanies most purchases applied to moral decisions? It doesn't which is all the more reason we need to look at the short and long-term consequences of our decisions. No action can be recalled; no hour lived again. All sales are final. Be careful what you say and do.

How many times have I listened to an unfaithful mate, an out-of-control teenager or a dishonest employee describe the pain their behavior caused? "If only I could take it back and undo the harm I have done, I would," they say through bitter tears. Yet even as they voice the words they know it is impossible.

So what is a person to do with painful memories? If you cannot change the past, what can you do? The first thing you must do is deal with the guilt that inevitably accompanies your actions.

There is no doubt that Judas was struggling under an enormous load of guilt over betraying Jesus. When he realized his plan had gone awry and he could not reverse the consequences of his actions, Matthew says that he took his own life. It was easier to face death than disappointment, his own and others.

Is there another way to deal with guilt? Must we forever live in shame and die in disgrace once we have made a bad decision? No. There is hope even when you have done the unthinkable. Forgiveness is real and powerful.

It is through forgiveness that the destructive process of sin is reversed. Grace restores self-esteem, influence and potential. It revives the desire to live. It redirects the purpose for living. It offers opportunities to heal wounds and make amends. It repairs relationships or builds new ones.

Perhaps this is why we refer to conversion as "being born again." Forgiveness and birth are inextricably interwoven.

I like John Claypool's analysis of Judas. He says that Judas did not stay around to see what God could do with his imperfections and mistakes. According to Claypool, what Judas did was no worse than what the other disciples did. They all betrayed and deserted him. Judas' tragedy occurred, though, when he did not give God a chance to redeem him. Peter did. Judas did not. How sad.

What about you? Will you let God redeem you? Will you let Him forgive you and birth you into a new person? Will you let Him help you heal the wounds you have caused and use you to keep others from making the same mistakes? I hope so and pray you will begin now.