

What Judas Missed

Gratefully adapted from "what Judas missed," by Denn Guptill @ SermonCentral.Com

Every year, on this Sunday, we essentially hear a variation of the same story which begins, *After the Sabbath as the first day of the week was dawning several women found an empty tomb* Now, don't get me wrong, it is a great story, which our hearing and believing assures us of our salvation. But this year let's hear a radically different story of the one person our Bible records as having missed Easter.

In 2015, a British newspaper published a top ten list of "**The World's Most Hated Men,**" as ranked by 7,000 collegiate students from 37 countries around the world. Most of the names you would recognize, one even may surprise you: Adolf Hitler, Osama bin Laden, Saddam Hussein, George W Bush, Joseph Stalin, Mao Zedong, Vladimir Lenin, Genghis Khan, Saladin, and Qin Shi Huang. I don't know why the last two made the list, but according to the article, George Bush earned fourth place for taking America into war with Iraq.

<https://www.express.co.uk/news/history/579021/World-s-most-hated-men-revealed-George-Bush-ahead-Stalin-Genghis-Khan>

But what was surprising from all such lists I surveyed was that **Judas Iscariot** has never mentioned on any of them. Think about it, this was the man who betrayed Jesus Christ, the son of God, King of Kings, Lord of Lord, Prince of Peace.

If fame was Judas' goal he certainly achieved that. You can find his name in every English dictionary as synonymous with "*betrayal,*" with being a traitor. People just don't like Judas or what he did. When was the last time you saw a Saint Judas Church? And a few years back when Biblical names were the flavor of the month for baby boys, we had Jephthas and Joshuas, Josiahs, Jeremiahs and Obadiahs. There are even lots of children named **Jesus**, but I never heard of anyone naming their child, **Judas**.

For that matter you might remember that Jesus' younger brother was also named Judas. But when he wrote the letter that would eventually become a part of our New Testament he used the diminutive of his name which was **Jude**. Now we don't read the books of I and II Pete or I and II and III Jack, so why was it that Jesus' younger brother shortened his name to Jude? Because he didn't want to be confused with Judas Iscariot. Would you?

So who was this Judas Iscariot and what moved him to betray Jesus?

We don't really know all that much about him, we do know that his father was named **Simon** and that his surname Iscariot could be translated, **Man of Karyat**, which is a small town just west of Jerusalem. From the Gospels, we discover that he was appointed treasurer of the twelve and that he became a thief, stealing from that very same treasury. **But what would compel a man to give over his closest friend to one of the most horrible deaths imaginable?**

There are actually six theories as to why Judas might have betrayed Jesus.

1) Being from Karyat, Judas would have been the only non-Galilean in the group. It may be that he grew bitter over being odd man out, which drove him to his dastardly deed.

2) Or, under pressure from some unknown Pharisee threat, he may have turned state's evidence to save his own skin; only to see too late the enormity of what he had done.

3) Maybe he did it out of greed; for the money. He probably would have denied that, but you know what they say, when anyone says it's not about the money, it's about the money. The thirty pieces of silver would have been worth close to \$10,000.00 today. Not a bad piece of change for an evening's work. Sometimes money talks so loud that it can't be ignored.

4) Or possibly Judas became fearful of Jesus because he couldn't hide his inner self from those all-knowing eyes. Other's only saw Judas as one of Jesus' disciples, a good man, a careful accountant, but Jesus knew him for who he truly was and so he had to destroy the one who saw into the darkest corners of his heart.

5) But, the most popular theory, is based on the fact that Judas' last name might actually have meant "Dagger Bearer." Which was the name of a band of violent nationalists who were prepared to use every means available to them, including assassination, to free Palestine from Roman rule. Most likely Judas never intended for Jesus to die that day. Instead, he was trying to force His hand, so that when arrested Jesus would use His power to liberate Israel. If that was the case then what a tragedy Judas witnessed when his plan fell to pieces.

Judas Iscariot; friend, confidant, disciple, treasurer, traitor. How it must have broken Jesus' heart when Judas stepped out of the crowd of soldiers to betray him with a kiss on the cheek.

The name Judas may have gone down in history as synonymous with betrayal, but the question we need to ask ourselves on this Easter Sunday is, **when Judas threw the money onto the floor of the Temple and went out to end his life, what did he miss?**

According to the text, Judas killed himself several hours before Jesus died. Before Pilate washed his hands of the affair, before Barabbas was released, before Jesus was flogged to within an inch of his life, before the crown of thorns was pushed onto Jesus' head, and they nailed Him to the cross, Judas was already dead.

So the real tragedy for Judas was that when Jesus looked down from the cross, at those who had falsely accused Him, mocked Him and spat on Him, at those who had slapped Him in the face, who had pulled out His beard and beat Him, at those who had jammed that crown of thorns deep into his forehead, scourged him close to death and then nailed Him to a cross to die ... as Jesus looked down at this mob and cried out, "*Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing,*" Judas was already dead (Luke 23:34).

So the most important thing that Judas missed – unlike the deserting disciples and denying Peter and all those other sinners who didn't deserve a thing – was in receiving "forgiveness" from Jesus Christ. Now you may be one of those who believe that what Judas did was so heinous, and so horrible that he never could have been forgiven. But our Bible says *The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but ALL to come to repentance* (2 Peter 3:9). Had he been there, that "ALL" would have included Judas, just as it now includes you and me.

Just as it was Judas' decision to betray Jesus, so it was Judas' choice to die most likely unforgiven and thus "lost" for all eternity. But, for us to write off the possibility of Judas ever obtaining forgiveness for his actions is scary. You see Christ's forgiveness is not dependent on our behavior and certainly not on whether we deserve it.

The forgiveness that each one of us needs is dependent on one thing only which is the Grace of God. **Grace** has been defined as the unmerited, undeserved, unearned love and forgiveness of God, freely given to us because of what Jesus Christ accomplished for us on that cross. Surely Judas needed such undeserved love as much or more than the rest of us.

You know the saddest part of the story is that Judas came so close to receiving Jesus' forgiveness. If we were to list the three things required in order for us to experience the forgiveness of God, they would be

- 1) Acknowledgment of our sin; admitting that we have done wrong.
- 2) Followed by repentance: having a sense of remorse – sorrow for our sin.
- 3) Then, by faith, accepting the forgiveness God offers us because of Jesus.

So how close did Judas come?

Matthew records that Judas acknowledged what he had done saying, "***I have sinned by betraying innocent blood***" (27:4). He didn't try to justify himself and offer up excuses for what he had done: "*Well, really, they knew who Jesus was; it was just a matter of time until they came to arrest Him anyways.*" Neither did he try to rationalize his guilt, "*How was I to know that they were going to hurt Jesus, let alone crucify Him?*" Instead he confessed, "I have sinned, I have betrayed an innocent man."

In verse three of that same chapter, we read that *when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, **he repented** and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders* (27:3). Judas was so filled with remorse for his deed that he brought the thirty pieces of silver back and when the priests refused it, he threw it on the floor at their feet and left to go hang himself.

Now most 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. For the most part we are like King David, who cried out, "*I have sinned against the Lord,*" but only after Nathan had confronted him with his adultery and murder. Yet even with Judas' acknowledgement of his sin and his remorsefulness, we have no record that he ever asked for forgiveness; instead, he declared himself guilty and sentenced himself to death.

There are people in churches all over the world and maybe right here today who know the truth of Romans 3:23, *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* They know that, and they are remorseful, they feel really bad about their sin. But for some reason they just can't bring themselves to seek forgiveness from Christ. Or worse still they believe that even if they asked, God wouldn't forgive them.

Strange as this may sound several times I have heard people give such an excuse: *I am too horrible a sinner for God to forgive me.* Reading of all the forgiven sinners and murderers named in the Bible, I don't know why anyone would think this way or what it is holding them back, whether it's pride or stubbornness. But I do know that it's a dangerous game to play, because you don't have to hang yourself to miss the forgiveness of Jesus Christ.

Three days after both Jesus and Judas died, Jesus rose again, but Judas remained dead. Then, when Christ appeared to the disciples, he made a statement that could no longer apply to Judas. *When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the*

house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, '**Peace be with you**' (John 20:19).

So the second thing that Judas missed was receiving the peace that Christ had promised His disciples. The evening of his betrayal, sitting together with all the other disciples at that last supper, but sadly after Judas had departed into the night, Jesus had said, *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid* (14:27).

I wonder if, walking through that night, Judas was struggling with his decision even as Jesus spoke about peace. I wonder if even then he was craving a peace that would never be his. The world can never give you that peace and that is why suicide is the second greatest cause of death among Americans aged 15-44.

We can fake "happy," and people may think we have everything in life under control, but only we alone can know whether or not we have that peace. World War One veteran **Felix Powell**, was the composer of "*Pack up your troubles in your old kitbag and smile, smile, smile.*" It was once called the most optimistic song ever written, and yet, later, Powell died by his own hand.

Every year in the U.S. over 40,000 men, women and children take their own lives. Why? Because often they are missing this critical ingredient of peace.

In the letter that he sent to the Christians in the city of Philippi, Paul wrote;

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
Philippians 4:6-7

If you have that peace then you know what I'm talking about, but have you ever tried to explain the depth of that peace to someone who hasn't experienced it? They just look at you funny.

You see, when most people talk about peace, they think about what's not going on in the Middle East. But the peace that the Bible talks about isn't just an absence of war. The Biblical word for peace literally means "completeness or wholeness," and it points to having unbroken relationships.

When we are granted forgiveness through the grace of God then our relationship with God is restored. Judas missed that restoration. Though he was a man who was torn apart with conflict, the method that he chose to resolve the conflict really wasn't a viable option at all. Suicide doesn't solve problems, it simply creates more problems for those left behind.

It is very doubtful that Judas was able to say at his point of death the same words that Jesus used, "*Father, I entrust my spirit into your hands!*"

Judas didn't damn himself by betraying Christ. But he most certainly did when he refused to set the relationship straight. I am convinced that had Judas sought the forgiveness which only Christ can give, then he would have experienced the peace that only Christ can provide and he would still be alive today; in eternity, as are all of those who have placed their trust in Christ.

One thing most commentators do agree on is that Judas was a fervent nationalist. He was looking for an end to the Roman Tyranny and Jewish enslavement and he thought the answer lay in the power displayed by Jesus. **The third thing that Judas missed was Power.** I'm sure that if you asked Judas what was the one thing that he craved, his answer would have been power: power to make a difference, power to affect change, power to get done the things that needed doing.

Instead, when Judas came to the end of his life, he felt so powerless to cope with the events engulfing him -- most of which were his own doing -- that he took what seemed to be the easiest way out, by taking his own life.

Judas was so caught up in his own problems, that he missed the one thing that he craved the most. Forty days after Judas died, Jesus made this promise to the remaining eleven disciples, *But **you will receive power** when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*" (Acts 1:8)

Within ten days of that promise, with the coming of the Holy Spirit, a power of unparalleled magnitude entered the lives of all Jesus' disciples and swept them out into the world. Judas missed the one thing that he had quested for all his life: power. The power that Christ gave to the disciples was a world changing power, a power that could only be described using the Greek word *dunamos*, the same root word from which we get dynamite.

The same power that Judas so desired but missed is still available to every Christian. The church in general today doesn't lend itself to images of power, we've been relegated to the back burner of society. We're no longer a force to be reckoned with. But let's be truthful, is that because the power of the Holy Spirit is any less available or any less powerful today? Or is it because we fail to claim and exercise that power?

Judas missed a lot, he missed the **forgiveness from God**, the **peace of Christ** and the **power of the Holy Spirit**, but I'm here today to tell you that you don't have to. All that Judas missed is available to you this morning.

God's forgiveness is just as thorough today as it was 2000 years ago; you haven't done anything so vile that He can't forgive you.

The peace of Christ still surpasses understanding in 2021 and the power of the Holy Spirit can still change our world as effectively as it changed the world of Peter and Paul.

But just as Judas had to make the choice for himself, you still have to make this choice for yourself. Today we come to the table to remember and celebrate the price paid so that we might be forgiven, find peace, and be reborn with the power of Christ to live life to the fullest. Everyone is invited to this table, but I suggest that if you have not yet done so, you first have a personal conversation with its host' bowing your head, opening your heart and praying "**God, be merciful to me, a sinner!**".

Let's pray about this.