



My name is Judas, Judas Iscariot. Yes, **that** Judas Iscariot, the disciple of Jesus Christ, the man who held the money purse for the disciples, the man who betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver, the man who handed Jesus over to the religious leaders. As life happens, with no intention on my part, I suppose I've become quite infamous. Rebels and social deviants have considered me a champion throughout the years. They have celebrated my rebellion and found inspiration in my heinous act of betrayal.

You, as followers of Jesus, probably don't like me, and I don't blame you. I'm not a likable person. I am responsible for the death of your Savior. You call Jesus your friend and Lord. And I grew to hate and despise him. You shouldn't like me.

I wasn't asked to share with you today for the normal reasons you bring in a guest speaker. I have not done anything heroic. I have no keen insight. I am not a model of good behavior. Instead, I am the opposite. I am an utter failure as a friend and as a follower of Jesus. I have been asked to share with you today how much of an utter failure I have been.

To do that, we've got to go back to the beginning.

I remember when I first saw Jesus. I had traveled quite a distance from my home in Southern Judea to hear his teaching and honestly, watch the spectacle. Jesus was going from synagogue to synagogue teaching, healing and casting out demons. It was amazing! The air was electric. No one had ever seen anything like it.

Simon's mother-in-law was really sick with a high fever. Jesus walks into the house and you could smell sickness. He saw her lying in pain on a mat on the floor. Jesus talked to the fever like it was a person, told it to go away, and her fever broke. After an hour, she was completely well, smiling, telling the story of how Jesus healed her. And like a typical Jewish mom, she began cooking food for everybody who was there. The whole thing turned into a party.

Then there was this leper. He barely looked human when he walked up to Jesus in a crowd, fell to his knees and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him and said, "I am willing, be cleansed." I'm watching this with a mixed sense of curiosity – what's going to happen? Is Jesus going to get leprosy? Is anything going to happen to this guy? The leprosy was gone in a moment. Holes

in his skin closed up before my eyes. His nose, which had been a gaping hole, reformed on the front of his face. That was crazy!

At that point, I was part of this large crowd of followers, and none of us knew exactly what to make of Jesus. Keep in mind that you have the whole story. We only had a few supernatural experiences to make sense of. But that didn't matter to us. We were part of something exciting and different. Life in first-century Israel was pretty boring. Work. Eat. Sleep. Work. Eat. Sleep. With Jesus, nothing was boring. Every day was filled with unpredictable action, excited crowds, persuasive teaching.

So, one night Jesus went up on a mountain by himself. When he came down in the morning, he was a changed man. There was a heightened level of intensity to his demeanor. He called all of us over to him—there must have been 200 of us—and quieted us down. He said, "I've been praying all night, talking to my Father." That kind of talk always fired us up. That meant something exciting was going to happen today. He said, "Today I'm going to make the final selection of my 12 disciples."

He named Peter and Andrew, the fishermen. James and John, the Sons of Thunder. And Matthew, the tax collector. Everybody knew they were "in" already. Jesus had been giving them special attention for weeks. So there were seven spots left. That made my chances 7 in 200 that I might be chosen too.

I remember standing there that morning; the bright sunlight cresting over the mountain; there was a cool soft breeze coming up from the valley; birds were singing in the nearby olive trees; little pebbles were crackling and scraping under our sandals. Jesus started calling out names. I held my breath, hoping he'd choose me. When he called my name, "Judas Iscariot," I felt a surge of electricity radiate through my body. I didn't know what I was getting myself into, but I knew one thing for sure—Jesus oozed power, and I wanted to be close to that.

Being chosen by a Rabbi to be his follower was the highest honor in Israel. Rabbis were the most popular and influential men in our culture. They were the equivalent to rock stars or movie stars in your culture. Everybody wanted to be around Jesus. I certainly did. I saw this as my chance to finally make a major move in my life, a chance to grab as much money and power as I could. I couldn't believe my good fortune when Jesus made me the holder of the moneybag. That meant I could start skimming a little money off the top, pad my pockets, before the wave of excitement died down.

When I look back, that was a big part of my downfall. I had a weakness to the temptation of money and power. I wanted them badly. And I misunderstood and misinterpreted things Jesus was saying about money and power.

One time Jesus told the disciples and me that we would receive 100x's whatever we had left behind. If we followed him, left everything behind, then we'd get 100x's what we left. That's a huge multiplier! Granted, I didn't leave much behind but still 100x's even a little is a lot.

Jesus told me once that I would rule next to him on a throne, judging the 12 tribes of Israel. Everybody I'd ever seen on a throne was rich, rich, rich. That is exactly what I wanted.

And talk about power—I already told you about his healing powers: Simon's mother-in-law and the leper. There were thousands more and many other demonstrations of power. I loved it! I figured if I could just get a fraction of that power...

He was driving demons out of people. He told waves to calm down and they did. He turned water into wine. Three times I saw him bring people back to life—Jarius' daughter, the kid from Nain and Lazarus. Lazarus was the most impressive, by far! Lazarus had been dead four days. He was in the tomb, with the stone blocking the entrance. Jesus said, "roll back the stone. Lazarus come on out." And he did.

Here's what hooked me. Jesus said, "anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things." I was totally hooked. I didn't know what he meant by "faith in him," who needed faith. You could see the miraculous powers. What I mean by being totally hooked is this, I wanted to do what he was doing and if I could do even greater things, that would be hard to imagine.

Looking back, I see how confused and warped I was. Jesus was talking about a spiritual kingdom and I was thinking about an earthly kingdom. I heard what I wanted to hear and ignored the obvious. Jesus wasn't using his power to rule the earth; he was using his power to serve and save the world, looking forward to a spiritual eternity. I didn't want any part of that, so I chose to filter what I heard.

Jesus had so many chances to seize earthly power and rule as a King. Crowds of thousands would sit and listen to him teach, all day long. People would give him expensive items. Heck, he could perform any miracle he wanted. But the more his popularity grew, the more reclusive Jesus became. He kept trying to sneak away from the crowds. I wanted him to energize the crowds. Jesus kept talking about humbly serving and I wanted him to tell people to serve us.

Toward the end, Jesus started talking more and more about suffering, being rejected by the powerful people and dying. And he was talking about it a lot. This was disturbing to all of us, but for

different reasons. I think the other disciples were disturbed because they really loved Jesus. I was disturbed because suffering, rejection and death did not live up to being King. I needed Jesus to become a powerful king so that I could secure an important position in his court.

So this was a progression that was going the wrong way for me. The last straw was the perfume at Simon the leper's house. A woman came with this really expensive bottle of perfume—it was worth an entire year's wages. She poured the entire bottle on Jesus. Jesus was happy about it. Happy. I was furious! I wanted to sell that perfume and use the money for a revolutionary cause. But my idea of a revolution and Jesus' was radically different.

I was fed up. I didn't know who the real Jesus was, but I think I fell in love with a fake Jesus. A Jesus who was going to give me everything I wanted. And slowly and dangerously I grew to despise the real Jesus. It got to the point that I felt my personal surrender to the real Jesus involved too much sacrifice. I'd have to give up everything to follow him. So let me tell you what my first mistake was and perhaps you can learn from me.

One thing you might learn from my experience is that hardening your heart against Jesus takes you down a bad path. That was me: a man with a hard heart. I turned my back on the greatest man in history. I am forever known as the one who betrayed God in the flesh. Don't make the same mistake I made by hardening your heart against Jesus.

By the time we all gathered together for what you know as The Last Supper, I had already struck a deal with the teachers of the law. I told them I would take them to Jesus when there were no crowds to give them trouble. They paid me 30 pieces of silver for doing this. Thirty pieces of silver. Not much money.

That was an awkward dinner for me. Here I am sitting with people I've betrayed and I felt pity for them. Yes, pity. They were so delusional. I didn't think anything was going to come of Jesus and his followers. I suppose a softhearted person would have felt more but I just pitied them. At least I had 30 pieces of silver and some amazing memories from my three years of following him. Then Jesus washed our feet. That solidified it for me. No king would ever wash feet. Who's ever heard of a servant king?

After the foot washing, Jesus said, "one of you will betray me" I knew he was talking about me. I figured one of the guys had accidentally seen me making the deal with the Chief Priests and Pharisees and told Jesus. Then he said to just a few of us that the betrayer was the guy he handed the next piece of bread. He dipped the bread and handed it to me. As he was handing me the piece of bread, my fingers and his were touching it at the same time and he looked me in the eye and I felt his disappointment and his love. He told me, "what you're about to do, do quickly." I was surprised he didn't do more to stop me. But that wasn't Jesus' way. He would lay out the choices and then give you the

choice. I'd seen him do this so many times with others, but I was blinded to the chance he was giving me. My mind was set. My heart hard. I didn't want any part of Jesus' so-called kingdom.

I left the stuffy confines of that upper room and felt the liberty of leading my own life. Only later would I see how ironic that was.

You know what happened next. I led the teachers of the law to where Jesus and the disciples were praying. Or at least Jesus was praying – everyone else was sleeping. Jesus loved going to the garden of Gethsemane. They arrested him and took him away.

What happened next though, I want you to know, was a complete surprise to me. I had no idea how much they hated Jesus. Here it was the middle of the night and Caiaphas, the high priest, is there. And he conducts a trial, questioning and accusing Jesus. This was illegal. You weren't supposed to hold court in the middle of the night. Various chief priests were scurrying around whispering in people's ear and then they'd come forward and make some kind of statement. They were all lies, trumped-up charges. Things were transpiring fast and it was looking really bad for Jesus. He was completely alone in the middle of hostile men and he wasn't saying anything to defend himself.

I hadn't thought it all the way through, but I never knew they intended to kill Jesus. I thought they might hold Jesus for a while in a prison. You know, let the excited crowds settle down, return home and return to every day life. Or perhaps they'd give Jesus a lecture and let him go. Or perhaps send him home to Nazareth and take over his dad's carpentry business.

Astonishment grew to dread as I watched that mock trial. At the end, when Caiaphas said, "Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God," Jesus said, "You have said so." The chief priest tore his robe and pronounced Jesus a blasphemer. The small crowd of high priests and teachers screamed out, "He deserves to die!" Then they spat in his face and beat him with their fists.

I was sickened. I did not agree to be part of something like this! I went immediately to the chief priests and elders. I told them, "I will have nothing to do with shedding an innocent man's blood."

They scornfully laughed at me. I rushed out in a huff and threw the 30 pieces of silver they'd paid me into the temple. That was my way of showing that I was not a part of this.

It's important to understand that I was not sorry that I betrayed Jesus. Nor was I sorry that I left Jesus. I was simply sorry that Jesus, an innocent man, was going to be killed and I was part of it. That shouldn't happen. I was a thief. I was selfish. And my heart was as hard as a rock. But I never thought of myself as a killer. I didn't want any part of the Chief Priests' plan.

I was a mess. I was caught in my own misery and I didn't see any way out. It's hard to understand this, I know, but I actually thought taking my own life was logical. That's how troubled I was by the development of what was going on. I went directly from throwing my silver into the temple to getting a rope, finding a tree and ending my life.

I've often compared myself to Peter. He messed up a lot too. The same night I betrayed Jesus, Peter denied him three times. Both of us turned our backs on Jesus. The difference was, Peter had a soft heart and I didn't. And with his soft heart, Peter reunited with Jesus and accepted the forgiveness and grace that Jesus offered him.

If there's one more thing you could learn from me it would be this—don't let your pride keep you from accepting Jesus' love, grace and forgiveness. With my hard heart, I was so prideful. I would not accept forgiveness and grace. And in my refusal, I sealed my own horrible fate. Since I took my own life on the morning Jesus died on the cross, I never saw Jesus alive again.

But if I had seen him after the resurrection, I've wondered what he would have said to me? You know, he would have thrown open his arms wide, offered me forgiveness and grace and love.

And I would have been too prideful to accept it.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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