

# JESUS AND JUDAS

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Why was Judas Iscariot lost and Peter saved? Judas was a gentleman; we don't read that he ever lost his temper and cursed and swore like Peter did. We don't read that Jesus ever rebuked him except that one last time when Mary washed Jesus' feet with her tears (Mk. 14:4-6). It appears that the disciples all pretty well had Judas sized up to be Prime Minister of the new Kingdom soon to be started. He obviously had executive ability. (When he left the Last Supper they thought he was off to do some legitimate business, Jn. 13:27, 28).

Is there such a big difference between betraying Jesus and denying Him with cursing and swearing that God can forgive one and not the other?

Both are devastating in self-condemnation when you realize what you have done. Some will suggest that Judas's love of money was the unforgivable part of his sin, but that would doom a lot of us because loving money is our common community sin. Both Judas and Peter were in anguish after they realized what they had done (Mt. 26:75; 27:3-5). Both "repented" (Matthew says Judas "repented himself" and with profound regret brought back his money—what more could he have done?). Could not Jesus have forgiven him?

But wait a moment: The "repentance" Judas experienced was sorrow for the consequences of his sin, and the repentance of Peter was sorrow for the sin itself (in the Greek, it's two different words

for "repent"). Judas hated himself so badly that he committed suicide—don't ever do that when you realize the enormity of your sin! The right thing to do when you are convicted of your sin is not to end your physical life, but choose to die to self. Let self be "crucified with Christ" (Gal 2:20). It's painful, but it's healing.

When you read the story of how Peter denied ever knowing Jesus when that teenage girl taunted and ridiculed him, how do you feel? Every time I read the story, I tremble. I cry out with the Eleven, "Lord, is it I?" I cry out with John Wesley, "There but for the grace of God, go I."

Peter was sincere; he didn't want to do that. He was horrified when he realized that he had done it. In fact, both Matthew and Luke say he went out and "wept bitterly." In other words, heart-brokenly. He threw himself on the ground and wished that he could die; he felt totally unworthy ever to help in the cause of God. (When Judas realized what he had done, he also wished that he might die and he did—at his own hand. The Bible says that Judas "repented himself," but it was a sorrow for the awful consequences of his deed, not that heart-broken abhorrence for his sin. Peter came within a hair's breadth of sharing the fate of Judas; but his heart-sorrow turned into true repentance.)

Why did Peter fail so miserably? What was his real problem? Many preachers have discussed the problem, and many more have and will ponder it. We need to understand or we too will fail in our time of severe test.

The story of Peter's tragic fall is linked with the story we read in Exodus 19:8 where Israel made the same kind of promise that Peter made when he promised that "though all [men] shall be offended, yet will not I" (Mark 14:29). Ancient Israel made the Old Covenant when they made their vain promise, "All that the Lord hath spoken, we will do." Now their Old Covenant has finally come full circle in the apostle Peter's vain promise.

It's time that we learned our lesson after these thousands of years: our salvation does not depend on our making promises to God; it depends on our believing His promises to us. That's the New Covenant. And that's the only place where you will find any Good News!

Peter came within a millimeter of losing his soul forever. But he did what Jesus said to do: fall on the rock and be broken (Mt 21:44). Judas hated the idea of self being crucified with Christ; Peter chose to love the idea. The issue is not how big is our sin; but do we choose to fall on that Rock and be "broken." When "Peter out and wept bitterly," that's what he did. He saw himself as he really was, and did not reject the conviction. God save us all!

All during the time that Judas Iscariot was one of the Twelve, he was constantly spreading among them subtle opposition to Jesus. He was a great man as to personality; the Eleven thought he was just the one qualified to become Prime Minister of the new kingdom Jesus would establish.

An example of his resistance of the Holy Spirit was his condemnation of Mary Magdalene for her offering when she washed the feet of Jesus with her

tears. Judas despised her for that, and the Eleven knew no better than to follow his lead and despise her also (Matt. 26:6-13; John 12:1-7; an illustration of how the final "shaking" can take place in the remnant church of the last days—many following some great apostate personality).

Judas sincerely thought that in betraying Jesus he could force Him to follow his lead in setting up His kingdom. He was so wise! But when he realized that he had betrayed the Messiah to His death, he was "remorseful and brought back the 30 pieces of silver, . . . saying, 'I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.'" Then he committed suicide.

In the day of final judgment when the resurrected lost (Rev. 20:5) gather before the Great White Throne and the book of record is opened for all to see what they have done with the life that God gave them, they too will be "remorseful." Jesus never said one word of reproach to Judas; he condemned himself. So at last the lost will condemn themselves, "will welcome destruction," and will choose to jump into the Lake of Fire (20:11-15).

"Why is Judas Iscariot so universally execrated when he was simply doing what the Bible says he had been ordained to do? For example, one year before the cross, Jesus had said, "Did not I choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?" (John 6:67). Wasn't Judas' betrayal predicted in Psalm 41:9 (John 13:18)? How could Judas help himself if long before he was even born it was prophesied that he should do this evil deed?" These questions troubled me; on which side of the "great controversy" did these questioners really stand?

There is a book touted as “The Gospel According to Judas Iscariot,” there seems to be a widely rooted subterranean sympathy for the Betrayer. The spirit of Judas Iscariot was “enmity against” Jesus, the open demonstration of what Paul says is by nature true of all of us when he says, “The carnal mind is enmity against God” (Rom. 8:7). All during Judas’ association with the Twelve, he was secretly trying to foment rebellion against Jesus, although for a time he was not himself conscious of his true spirit. Apparently he joined with the Twelve in the missionary journeys and even succeeded in casting out devils (Matt. 10:5-8; Luke 10:17, 18—a solemn disclosure—a servant of Satan can cast out Satan and work miracles!).

God’s foreknowledge is something He cannot help having, but it is not fore-ordination. God foreknew what Lucifer in his rebellion in heaven would become, but God did not program Lucifer to become the devil, or Satan. Lucifer himself chose to become what he became. It was the same with Judas Iscariot; the erstwhile disciple had what all of us have—freedom of choice. Like all who will at last be lost, he was a new “Esau” who had been given the precious “birthright” of eternal salvation but chose to “despise” and “sell” it.

Judas allowed something very prevalent and very modern to finally possess his soul: the love of money. Treasurer of the infant church, he allowed himself to become a thief (John 12:6) until he lost control and sold his Lord for the price of a slave (Ex. 21:32).

The story of Judas reminds us how easily we can switch sides in “the great controversy between Christ and Satan.” Oh Lord, save us from ourselves!

Unless Jesus loved Judas Iscariot as much as He loved the Eleven, he would have had an excuse for his sin, for no one can come to the Savior unless he is “drawn” (John 6:44). And Christ’s love is not love unless He draws “all” (12:32, 33). Therefore, Judas could not be an exception. Jesus loved him too.

But how could Christ love the man who He knew from the beginning would betray Him (6:70, 71)?

The Father favors the just and the unjust alike (Matt. 5:45, 46), thus treating every person as though he had not sinned, and as though he will not be lost. This is because He has won for “all men” a “judicial . . . verdict of acquittal” by His sacrifice (Rom. 5:15-18, NEB, KJV). For “every man” Jesus has died his second death (since the “foundation of the world,” Heb. 2:9; Rev. 13:8). That blanket “verdict of acquittal” included Judas, who need not ever die the second death except that like Esau he chose to “sell” and “despise” the “birthright” that Christ had won for him and given him (cf. Gen. 25:33, 34; Heb. 12:16, 17). Jesus also gave the same birthright to us all (1 Tim. 4:10).

For Him to be fair, He must have given that same “verdict of acquittal” to Judas during the years of His fellowship with the Twelve; Jesus respected him courteously, genuinely, sincerely, for Judas had natural abilities. He was a soul for whom Christ was giving Himself. Jesus thought of him as “My own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate My bread,

has lifted up his heel against Me” (John 13:18; Psalm 41:9; some scholars see Judas in 55:12-14; Jesus addressed him at the betrayal with special, wounded endearment, Matt. 26:50).

In the story of Judas Iscariot we see Jesus contending with the raw “mystery of iniquity,” defeated in His quest to save a dear one eternally who would not let himself be saved. Painful. His pain will be repeated in the final death of every unbelieving soul.

Many of the Psalms of David are intensely interesting because they are prophetic of the life experience of “the Son of David”—Jesus. Sometimes today the tabloid newspapers get hold of scraps of news that the sedate papers don’t tell us; they are called “scoops.” The Psalms of David have “scoops” about the personal life of Jesus that the four New Testament gospels don’t tell us. One is Psalm 22 that tells us of His secret prayer He uttered while He was hanging on His cross; another is #69, likewise. The Holy Spirit inspired David to write these Psalms that enable us to “see” Jesus like He was our next-door neighbor. They help us realize how human He was as well as divine (His name is “Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us” (Matt. 1:23).

Reading Psalm 55 in Peterson has become a revelation: it tells about Judas Iscariot! Here we have intimate glimpses of Jesus wrestling with a pain almost unbearable. He has come to save His own people, and their leaders hate Him and make His days keenly painful. John’s Gospel does tell us of the deep underground hatred that Jesus had to

contend with in Jerusalem, that broke His heart; but Psalm 55 opens a window into how Jesus felt when one of His close Twelve secretly sided with the scribes and Pharisees and day by day was preparing to betray Him. “Get Me out of here on dove wings, I want some peace and quiet,” we hear Jesus praying (vs. 6). “This isn’t the neighborhood bully mocking Me—I could take that. . . . It’s . . . you! My best friend! . . . And this My best friend, betrayed his best friends [the Eleven]. . . . His words, which were music to My ears, turned to daggers in My heart” (vss. 12-14).

Did Jesus love Judas? Of course; He loved all Twelve. Was this cancer of disloyalty and betrayal growing within the Twelve, painful for Jesus? Of course! Christ’s divine foreknowledge did not lessen the pain of His human suffering. You can be sure that today as your High Priest Jesus feels the pain you know when someone close to you turns against you! He “lived” in the Book of Psalms; you must do so, too.

Did Jesus love Judas Iscariot, the man who eventually betrayed Him? Did He love him a little less than He loved the Eleven disciples? How could Jesus love Judas the same if He foreknew that he would double cross Him and sell Him for the price of a slave?

And if Jesus did actually love Judas less than He loved the Eleven, wouldn’t Judas use that as an argument at last in the final judgment, “It’s Your fault I am lost! You didn’t do the same for me that You did for those people who are safe inside the City!” Many have a hard time with this question;

they sympathize with Judas. They feel drawn as by an undertow to feel that God pre-programmed Judas to be lost, “predestinated” hell for him.

And they feel the same deep undertow sweeping them into the idea that they too have been predestinated to be lost. The result: despair. Can we find unmistakably clear truth in the Bible?

(1) “God our Savior . . . will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:3-6). Clear as sunlight: (a) God wanted Judas to be saved. (b) He would have been saved if he had “come to a knowledge of the truth” (“knowledge” = *epignosis* which is more than head awareness; it is to “know upon,” “full discernment,” “acknowledgment,” Strong 1922).

(2) “The man Christ Jesus gave Himself a ransom for all,” including Judas Iscariot. When the Savior looked in Judas’s eye and said, “Judas, do you betray the Son of man with a kiss?” (Luke 22:48), the knowing glance was there—I am dying your second death (Hebrews 2:9 says it).

(3) When Jesus washed his feet in John 13:2-5, the betrayer’s heart thrilled with a thought that he must kneel down and confess his crime and “be . . . reconciled to God.” But he steeled his heart and committed the unpardonable sin of rejecting the final overture of God’s much more abounding grace seen in His love. He scorned agape.

No one, no one, is predestinated to do that!

Jesus loved Judas “unto the end” (vs. 1). He loves you that far, too—up to your last breath.

The old Spiritual asks, “Were you there when they crucified my Lord? . . . Oh, sometimes, it causes me

to tremble, tremble . . .” Yes, but not through pre-incarnation, but because the cross of Christ is an eternal reality.

The accident of birth does not excuse me from involvement. As one writer said, the arms of the cross reach from paradise lost to paradise regained. And when I read the old, old story, “it causes me to tremble,” for I wonder what I would have done when Mary washed Jesus’ feet with her tears. A wise businessman present said it was a crazy waste of money, and he fomented “indignation” among the others of the Twelve, and “they” too loyally said “amen!” to his hard-hearted condemnation of this apparently fanatical woman. She had broken her alabaster flask of “very precious” ointment and “wasted” it!

He was a keen-minded church administrator, knew how to get things done, the only savvy Jew among eleven backwater Galileans. It was a classic case of group-think, of committee or church board solidarity. “I tremble,” because I fear I would have joined them in this man’s logical, reasonable criticism (Matt. 26:8). I was born with a naturally “hard,” worldly heart. “Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?” asks Jeremiah (Lam. 1:12), and I could easily have been among those to whom it was “nothing,” stony hearted in the presence of the greatest love of eternity.

I too naturally want to be savvy, not to appear soft; I’m embarrassed if tears come to my eyes and I choke up. I am by nature a sitting duck for siding with Judas Iscariot in his “indignation” against a flagrant “waste” of “very precious” resources. Poor

Judas! He was unprepared (and so were they all!) for an unexpected confrontation with pure unadulterated *AGAPE*-love. The volcano in his heart erupted with anti-love emotion, and the former disciple betrayed himself for what he actually was all along—a closet sympathizer with Lucifer who was the original anti-love, hard-hearted rejecter of the cross of Christ, for self is always crucified thereon. “No cross for me, no crucifixion of self!” crowed Lucifer, and therewith became Satan, the “adversary.” And now here was one of the Twelve echoing his same heart-sentiment, with the Eleven so blinded that they could do nothing but say “Amen!” Yes, “I tremble.”

Let all who are saved at last “tremble,” for we have all come within a millimeter of eternal disaster.

This is shocking to many people, but it is true: God never tells anybody Bad News, only Good News, or if He can't tell you Good News, He keeps still. You may object, “Well, didn't He tell King Saul Bad News just before his death?” (1 Sam. 28). No, the one who told Saul the Bad News that discouraged the apostate king and drove him to suicide, was Satan, not God. “Well, didn't God tell Bad News to the people destroyed in the Flood in the time of Noah? Or to King Pharaoh of Egypt? Or to Achan, who was stoned? Or to Korah, Dathan, and Abiram?” (Gen. 6; Ex. 4-14; Joshua 7, etc.).

I think if you will read the stories carefully you will see that in each instance, God gave those people opportunity to repent; He never wanted to discourage anyone, or drive anyone to suicide. Did Jesus drive Judas Iscariot to suicide? No, not at all;

when Judas betrayed Him, He called him “Friend” (Matt. 26:50), but never said another word to him.

When we come to the New Testament, again an angel says to the world, “I bring you good tidings of great joy” (Luke 2:10), and Paul says for all the apostles, “We declare unto you glad tidings” (Acts 13:32), and the last message God will send to the world will be “the everlasting Good News” (Rev. 14:6-12).

Since sin came into the world, God has been in the business night and day, with never a holiday, of being a Saviour. That is His relationship to you, as of this moment, even though you may have sinned grievously. He always has a message of hope for you, and as long as you have ears to hear it, He will declare it to you in some way, even if you are facing prison execution. Even if you must die, there is a whisper of Good News as you draw your last breath—please repent, He says; believe My love, appreciate My sacrifice for you, My gift of justification, receive My gift of forgiveness, My eternal life that I share with you. You only “sleep in Jesus” until the “morning” of the resurrection. From where you stand at this moment, there is a path of hope, of Good News, for you. Respond to that Good News, believe it.