

The Twelve: Judas Iscariot, Part 1

Luke 6:16

Perhaps you've never thought about it before, but it's remarkable to note that our Lord intentionally and prayerfully, our Lord chose Judas Iscariot to be one of the twelve Apostles. And our Lord knew full well exactly what he was getting into with Judas. I want you to notice in Luke Chapter 6, verse 12, "In these days, Jesus went up to the mountain to pray, all night he continued in prayer to God. When day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named Apostles." Peter and Andrew, and James and John, Philip and Bartholomew, Matthew and Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, Judas the son of James, and he chose Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor."

Today, we're going to look at a wholly negative example, Judas Iscariot. It's interesting that apart from a few hints that Judas' betrayal during Jesus' ministry, what we know about Judas comes from the end of his life. Judas makes a decision to betray Jesus, and it comes late in Jesus' ministry. He colludes

and collaborates with the chief priests. He makes the agreement with them, then he proceeds with the betrayal of Jesus, leading to the arrest and crucifixion of our Lord. The Bible records even Judas' remorse, his suicide, but no heart of repentance, no repentance leading to salvation.

We know that the other disciples failed, too. They all abandoned him when he was arrested. Peter even failed miserably, denying Christ. But their remorse was what the Bible calls godly sorrow, or godly grief, 2 Corinthians 7:10. "Godly sorrow produces repentance that leads to salvation without regret." Worldly sorrow though, that's what we see in Judas; worldly sorry is remorse without repentance. Worldly sorrow is a tortured conscience with no heart change. Worldly sorrow produces nothing but death. We know that Judas is a tragic case, but in the sovereign wisdom of God, he has become a lesson for the believing church, for all of us.

Today, we're gonna begin to make the case that the inclusion of Judas Iscariot among this original list of twelve Apostles, it's not only intentional, but it becomes essential. Judas became just as important as all the other Apostles in fulfilling, in his own way, God's purposes. That may seem somewhat surprising to you. It does to all of us when we stop to

think carefully about the role of Judas Iscariot. He became notorious as the anti-Apostle, as the apostate. He was a skilled hypocrite all along the way. He's the one who betrayed the Son of Man. He spoke, when he spoke with a forked tongue, and then he approached Jesus with a serpent-like kiss.

It seems almost too hard to believe that Judas would be an intentional choice on behalf of our Lord, but he was. There is almost nothing on this earth more universally despised as a betrayer. Even the unbelieving world hates a traitor. Ancient examples of treachery, like Brutus and Cassius, who betrayed Julius Caesar. Examples from American history like Benedict Arnold, or even more recent examples like Aldrich Ames or Robert Hanson, selling secrets to the Soviets. Those names are synonymous with treachery and betrayal. They're spoken with a, a despising.

More damage has been done proportionally by the subtle subversion of traitors than by any other force. It's impossible really to calculate the extent of damage that they've caused. Money wasted, partnerships dissolved, friends turned against one another, all because we trusted someone who proved to have bad character and evil motives. That's Judas Iscariot. He's the

prototype for all future betrayers. Every future betrayer is compared back to him because of the gravity of his treachery.

So why did Jesus choose him? Perhaps Judas seemed to be a good prospect, had a promising future, sadly he turned on Jesus and just let everybody down. Do we simply shrug and say, well, eleven out of twelve isn't bad. Jesus did okay there. It's a pretty good average. After all, everyone has a free will, right? Judas shows that even Jesus can't predict the free actions of human beings. Look, do we really think Jesus didn't see this coming? No. Jesus knew. Jesus told his disciples in John 13:18, he said, "I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled. He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me." Judas Iscariot's betrayal did not take Jesus by surprise. Jesus had known, from, about Judas from the very beginning. And I want to show you that if you'll turn in John 6.

Jesus is talking to the large group of disciples who'd been following him, and just before they peeled away because they couldn't handle his teaching. They didn't like what he was saying, John 6:64, Jesus said, "There are some of you who do not believe." It's interesting that they named themselves disciples. They followed Jesus for a time, but he says, "There are some of you who do not believe."

Then John narrates the scene, he tells the readers that "Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was," singular, "who would betray him." As Jesus predicted, many of those disciples did turn away from him. They turned back and they no longer walked with him. But those twelve remained, didn't they? And that didn't surprise Jesus at all because he knew believer from unbeliever.

He knew true disciple from false pretender. And so to teach his disciples about the sovereignty of God and to assure their hearts about their own condition, he told them in John 6:65, he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the father." Verse 66, "After this, many of his disciples turned," turned, "back and no longer walked with him." And, "so Jesus said to the twelve, 'Do you want to go away as well?'" And, "Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.'" And, "Jesus answered them, 'Did I not choose you, the twelve? And yet one of you is a devil.' He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray him."

Sobering, isn't it? But clear. That Jesus is not at all surprised by Judas' defection. Not at all. In fact, it was

because of Judas' defection and betrayal in the very forefront of Jesus' mind that was in full consideration of this evil outcome that Jesus chose Judas and included him among the twelve. Before making his selection, we have to remember Jesus had spent all night praying to his father on the mountain. His decision about those men was saturated in prayer. This is not an unknown. It's not an oversight. Jesus was deliberate. He prayed about it. And he came away from prayer convinced that selecting Judas to be one of the twelve Apostles conformed with the sovereign will of his father. Jesus said, John 5:19, "Truly, truly I say to you, the son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the father doing. For whatever the father does, that the son does likewise. For the father loves the son and shows him all that he himself is doing."

So it's important that we recognize from the very outset that the inclusion of the Judas Iscariot among the twelve was the foreordained, predetermined will of the Triune God. But we're still left with that question, that nagging question: Why? What did Christ have in mind? What is the God-glorifying, Christ-exalting purpose for numbering Judas among the twelve? I see two overarching purposes of God in ordaining Judas Iscariot to have his part in this initial part of the apostolic ministry; two purposes for including him as one of the twelve. The first

is an ecclesiological purpose. The second is a redemptive purpose. The redemptive purpose is the most foundational. We're going to see how God ordained that everyone, including Judas Iscariot, everyone would testify to the perfect redemption of Jesus Christ. That's one foundational purpose of God in ordaining Jesus to choose Judas Iscariot, to include him among the twelve.

We want to look at the ecclesiological purposes of God at least a part of it. As Christ intentionally added Judas Iscariot to this very exclusive small group of twelve Apostles, and all of this for the sake of the church. That's what I mean by ecclesiological. The word *ekklesia* literally, called out of, called out from. It means in the day and age, it meant assembly. There were called-out assemblies who would gather in the market square, gather at a pagan temple, or gather politically, or for other purposes.

So it's an assembly, that's what *ekklesia* means. When applied to an assembly that gathers in the name of Jesus Christ, we're talking about a Christian assembly, which in the earliest days was the assembly of the local church. Ecclesiology, then, it's the study of the biblical doctrine of the church. And what I'm saying is that God ordained his son Jesus Christ to select

Judas Iscariot, name him as one of the twelve Apostles with a view to instructing the church. Was he a true Apostle? No. He's replaced by Matthias later. But with a view to instructing the church, Jesus included him.

Several things we learn by the inclusion of Judas Iscariot, than in, form ministry in the local church. Bottom line, here's what Christ wants us to learn from Judas Iscariot, which is absolutely foundational for the life and the health of his church. He wants us to learn, key term, he wants us to learn discernment. Discernment. In my mind this has been one of the perennial problems within the evangelical church of our day, its, its utter refusal to discern. God would have his people to be discerning people, armed with clear-headed black-and-white thinking, so that Christians are able to make good and safe, holy and righteous decisions. When Christians are discerning Christians, they are not in the words of Ephesians 4:14, they are not tossed to and fro by waves, they are not carried about by every wind of doctrine, they are not deceived by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. When Christians are discerning, it means they're mature.

Sadly, biblical and theological discernment has not been the mark of evangelical Christianity over the last five or six



decades and we are the worse for it. Evil of all kinds is now tolerated within the ranks of the church, even embraced. In some cases it's even celebrated along with the unbelieving world, whether it's in the interest of political expediency, or co-belligerency, or just wanting to be liked, which is really the fear of the man, right? Not the fear of the Lord. But whatever the reason, whatever the motivation, Christians have refused to be discerning, and we've tolerated and embraced all kinds of errors in doctrine, all kinds of bad behavior that we ought not to embrace or accept. From the very beginning and foundation of God's people, we see God's call for his people to be a discerning people.

Remember, God tested Eve in the garden. He allowed a serpent to slither into her world and offer her an alternative to God's truth. It was a test. He wanted Eve to think, to make a distinction between what she was hearing and what she knew to be true. Both Cain and Able brought sacrifices to the Lord, right? They offered sacrifices to God. What are we to discern from that? Jacob and Esau, they came from the same womb, didn't they? When you look at Israel, God's instructions to the nation in the law of Moses, every law of God forces his people to discern. What doctrine will I believe? Will I listen to this self-professed prophet, or will I scrutinize everything I hear by the

written word of God? Will I choose to worship and serve God, or will I serve idols?

Even on a practical level of daily living, many such questions would come to their minds because of the law. Will I eat this forbidden food, or will I eat only the food on the clean list? When I find evidence on my body or on the body of one of my loved ones, my family, of a skin disease, will I submit myself and my home to the scrutiny of the priests to determine whether or not I need to be quarantined, or will I just let it go, cover it up?

In New Testament times as well, the situation for God's people is no different. We already talked about the Apostle John, who, he wrote in such antithetical language, light versus darkness, truth versus error, life versus death, love versus hatred, and on and on. What is he doing there? He's promoting discernment in the church. Peter as well, he warned Christians, pointing back to the Old Testament, which was replete with evidence about this, what he's about to warn.

He exhorted Christians to stay grounded in the written word of God and to be discerning. Why? Because, 2 Peter chapter 2, "false prophets arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive

heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many of them will follow their sensuality, because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. In their greed they will exploit you with false words."

You know in that warning what's interesting for our day? It says, "Many will follow their sensuality." You know what sensuality is? It's being driven along by your senses, your five senses. Just running after whatever your five senses tell you is good and right for your life. Boy, do we live in such a world? And hasn't that attitude infected the church? Peter says, "Watch out, be on your guard." God's people must be a discerning people and, beloved, that is why Jesus chose Judas Iscariot to be numbered among the twelve. Judas provides the church with an enduring and abiding word of warning, one that is etched into the very foundation of the church itself that not everyone who is with us is truly of us.

Now we want to be careful here. We don't wanna become like the discernment police, right, you know because we're truth people, driven by pharisaical pride and arrogance that we are in the truth and all those people over there are not in the truth. That's not what we're after here, wearing doctrinal clarity like

a shiny badge on our puffed-out chest because we're discernment police. That's not at all what's going on here.

But listen, if you understand the shepherding concept that is thematic in all of Scripture from the very beginning to the very end, Jesus Christ himself being identified as the Chief Shepherd, we have to realize then that a key concern in shepherding, that whole mindset, it has to do with what; not just the feeding, but the protection of the sheep.

Safe sheep are happy sheep, thriving sheep, well-fed and productive sheep. But sheep that are neglected by hirelings, sheep that are harried by threats, that are chased and torn to pieces by wolves, sheep that are used to make profit out of, they're sad sheep. They're bewildered, they're beguiled, they're dirty and defiled, they're degraded and scrawny, unproductive. As Jesus said, John 8:31 to 32, he said "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Listen, truth is freedom. Error is bondage. Truth is joy and liberty in God. Lies: they're snares, traps, pitfalls to destruction and that's why our Chief Shepherd Jesus Christ included one such as Judas Iscariot among the twelve as a warning to all of us. We have to be discerning Christians; sheep

they have to be discerning sheep. Specifically, now, what should we discern? What is the first and most fundamental sphere in which we need to exercise discernment? Do you know where it is? It's in the heart, isn't it?

Be discerning about the condition of your own heart. Be discerning about the condition of your heart. And again, I just want to emphasize at this point, we're not talking about somebody else's heart. You can't see or know anybody else's heart. Man sees not as God sees, right? Because man looks on the external and outward appearance. What else can we do? God looks on the heart. We can't see that. We see what we see on the outside. We're fruit inspectors, sure, but we don't know the heart. Only God does. So we need to be watchful and discerning first and foremost about our own hearts. That's the first area of discernment. Solomon warned in Proverbs 4:23, He said, "Guard your hearts with all vigilance for from it flow the springs of life." Why do we need to be on our guard? Because Jeremiah said, Jeremiah 17:9, "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick; who can understand it?"

We have to discern the condition of our hearts as a regular habit of life. Judas Iscariot would have done well to pay attention, pay heed to the warning signs in his own heart. And I

think that's the first warning of Scripture about Judas even from his earliest introduction, which we read in Luke 6, and each of the synoptics tells us. It comes from the apostolic list, just this warning in Matthew 10:4, Mark 3:19 and our text Luke 6:16. He's called Judas Iscariot, literally, a man of Kerioth, Ish Kerioth. John 6:71, as we read, tells us he's the son of Simon Iscariot, which is evidence that Iscariot is not a family name, but it's actually a name that identifies his origin. This is where his people are from Kerioth. Kerioth is a town in Judah. Joshua 15:25 refers to it. It's located about 20 miles east of the Dead Sea, and that makes Judas the only man among the twelve who is not a Galilean. He's a Judean. He has Judean interests, which, by the way, go hand-in-hand with religio-political interests; big deal in Israel.

But besides his name, besides his Judean origin, whatever else we might surmise or suspect about his political leanings, all three synoptic Gospels, the authors provide a warning to us in their apostolic lists about the nature of Judas' trajectory and his treachery. None of them, it's interesting, calls Judas, as we do, none of them call him the traitor, the betrayer, which would point to something that is native in his character.

Rather, the Gospel writers, they use the verb form to describe his action of betrayal. Judas is, in both Matthew 10:4 and Mark 3:19, he is "the one who betrayed him." Luke's language is subtle, but he calls us to reflect when he includes Judas Iscariot the one "who became a traitor." It's as if to warn us: Beware, dear reader, even Judas wasn't born a betrayer. He didn't start out that way; he became a traitor. It's a warning, it's a word of caution to us.