

Valley View Chapel
March 11, 2012
Heroes and Villains, Part 1
“Judas Iscariot”

Introduction

In 1856 John Greenleaf Whittier wrote a bittersweet poem entitled “Maud Muller.” It was about a young man and woman who met quite by coincidence at a well where Maud gave him a drink of water. They began to talk with each other and a spark was kindled. They were drawn to one another as they had never been drawn to anyone else. But the young man came from a rich and prominent family and the young woman was obviously poor and not socially connected. Though he felt like this was his woman of destiny, he did not feel free to pursue the relationship. Whittier wrote:

“But he thought of his sisters, proud and cold,
And his mother, vain of rank and gold.
So, closing his heart, the Judge rode on,
And Maud was left in the field alone.”

The poem goes on to tell us that man eventually married a rich woman who was more concerned with fashion and appearances than character. Maud married a rough, insensitive, unlearned man with whom she had “many children.”

Often over their mutually unhappy years, Maud and the mystery man remembered their encounter that day by the well and wondered what life might have been if they had followed their hearts. Whittier’s closing words are poignant indeed:

“God pity them both! and pity us all,
Who vainly the dreams of youth recall;
For of all sad words of tongue or pen,
The saddest are these: ‘It might have been!’”

In this 5-week series leading up to Easter called “Heroes and Villains,” we’ll be examining the lives of 5 Bible characters who had important roles to play in the death and resurrection of Jesus. This morning we’ll look at one of the “villains” of the passion story – Judas Iscariot.

When I think of Judas Iscariot, I think of the famous lines from “Maud Muller”: *“For of all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these: ‘It might have been!’”*

In his book *The Twelve* Leslie Flynn wrote: “Think what Judas could have become! Churches, schools, orphanages, and charities are named after the other apostles. They are remembered with fond affection – but not Judas Iscariot.”

Instead of being covered with honor and respect, this disciple covered himself with dishonor and shame. Baby boys are named after Peter, James, John, Matthew, Thomas, and the others. I've never heard of parents naming their baby boy "Judas."

John MacArthur said of Judas Iscariot in his book *Twelve Ordinary Men*: "He is the most colossal failure in human history."

The 14th-century Italian poet Dante Alighieri in his *Inferno* said that the ninth circle of hell, the lowest place, was reserved for "traitors."

It may surprise you to know that there was another disciple named "Judas." He made his cameo appearance in the gospels in John 14:22, "Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, 'But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?'" (NIV)

This "other Judas" is called the "son of James" and listed among the disciples in Luke 6:16 and Acts 1:13.

Maybe it was the stigma attached to the name "Judas" that prompted Matthew to identify him as "Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus." Matthew 10:3 (NKJV)

Jerome, the 4th-century church father, called him "Trinomius," or "the man with three names."

But the Judas who is our focus this morning had only one name "Judas Iscariot."

The designation "Iscariot" is open to several interpretations.

Many scholars believe that "Iscariot" comes from two words "ish" meaning "man" and "kerioth" a town in southern Judah. So his name would be: "Judas, the man of kerioth." If true, then Judas Iscariot was probably the only disciple from Judea, the rest coming from Galilee to the north. Some believe that this fact contributed to Judas feeling like an outsider, the "odd man out" in the apostolic band.

Other scholars believe that "Iscariot" is connected to the Greek word "sikarios" which means "dagger-bearer." The "sicarii" was a group of fanatical Zionists who were committed to terrorism and assassination in order to bring about the revolution which would free Israel from Roman oppression and restore the former glory of the Davidic kingdom. If this is true, then Judas saw Jesus as the great liberator and revolutionary.

There are two lessons that we can learn from his sad and sorry story.

It is possible to be identified with Christ and not be a Christian

There are three lists of Jesus' disciples in the gospels – Matthew 10:2-5; Mark 3:16-19; and Luke 6:14-16. Though he is the last one named in each list, the fact is that Judas Iscariot *was listed* among Jesus' twelve disciples! He was identified everywhere and by

everyone as a genuine follower of Jesus Christ. But he was not a genuine follower of Jesus Christ.

In fact, for three years he fooled the other eleven disciples. So great was their trust in Judas Iscariot's integrity that they elected him as their treasurer.

Moreover, in the Upper Room when Jesus said in John 13:21 that "one of you is going to betray me," the disciples didn't all say: "It has to be Judas. We know he's the one!" John 13:22 said that "His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant." (NIV)

In *The Murder of Jesus* John MacArthur stated: "He was such an expert in the art of hypocrisy that he managed to conceal his true character from everyone except Jesus."

This is indeed a sobering thought. God knows *who I really am* at the core of my being. No one else knows for sure who I really am. I Samuel 16:7 tells us: "People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." (NLT)

In John 2:24-25 we read: "Jesus...knew all men....he knew what was in a man."

One of the most terrifying statements in the Bible in the Bible was uttered by Jesus near the end of *The Sermon on the Mount*: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" Matthew 7:21-23 (NIV)

He could have been describing Judas Iscariot. He called Jesus his "Lord." Together with the other disciples, he prophesied in Jesus' name. He drove out demons. He performed miracles. Yet he was not a genuine follower of Christ. No one knew it. Only Jesus.

Conrad Zdzierak, carried out a string of robberies in Ohio. The key to his success was using a technologically advanced mask to transform himself from a 30-year-old white man into an African-American man. The mask came from a Los Angeles company which sells "movie quality" silicone masks that achieves what its advertisements call "ultra high realism." The robber's disguise was so effective that local police mistakenly arrested a young black man for the crimes. Zdzierak almost got away with his crimes, but he bragged to a friend who turned him in.

On my *Facebook* page is a quote from the late great basketball coach John Wooden: "*Reputation* is who people *think* you are. *Character* is who you *really* are." Everyone thought that Judas was a genuine disciple. He had all the external marks of a fully committed follower of Jesus Christ. But in his heart of hearts, he was another person altogether.

How about us? Are we the same people on Saturday night that we are on Sunday morning? We may fool each other. But we can't fool Christ. John said in Revelation 1:14 that his "eyes were like blazing fire." (NIV)

It is possible for the love of money to corrupt our character

The Apostle Paul warned Timothy his young apprentice: "Lust for money brings trouble and nothing but trouble. Going down that path, some lose their footing in the faith completely and live to regret it bitterly ever after." (Msg)

The love of money was one reason why Judas decided to betray Jesus.

Judas had a prior history of an inordinate love of money. The account is plainly forth in John 12:1-7 –

"Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, 'Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages.' He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it. 'Leave her alone,' Jesus replied. '[It was intended] that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial.'" (NIV)

Judas was the treasurer for the group but he used his position to enrich himself. The perfume that Mary lavished on Jesus was worth over 300 denarii, a year's wages for a working man in first-century Israel. Had Mary chosen to donate it to Jesus, Judas would have skimmed his cut off the top before giving the remainder to the poor. Jesus thwarted his plan and Judas didn't like it one bit.

The nineteenth century French novelist Alexandre Dumas observed: "Do not value money for any more nor any less than it is worth; it is a good servant but a bad master." Money is a harsh master indeed. It enslaves and ruins those who value it too highly.

All this talk of suffering and death led Judas to believe that he had no future staying with Jesus. So he cut the best deal he could with the religious authorities.

Matthew 26:14-16 records the despicable deed: "Then one of the Twelve — the one called Judas Iscariot — went to the chief priests and asked, 'What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?' So they counted out for him thirty silver coins. From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over." (NIV)

According to Exodus 21:32 thirty pieces of silver was the purchase price of a slave. Judas thought more of a paltry sum of money than of the man who had loved him, taught him, and trained him for greatness.

It is absolutely amazing the depths to which some people will sink to get money.

I never saw the movie *Indecent Proposal* nor would I recommend it. But the story line reinforces my point. A couple are married and have started their respective careers. She finds the perfect spot to build their dream house, and they get loans to finance it. When the recession hits, they stand to lose everything they own, so they go to Vegas to have one shot at winning the money they need. After losing at the tables, they are approached by a wealthy man who offers them a million dollars for a night with the wife. The couple decides to accept the offer, and a contract is signed the next day. She flies to the rich man's private yacht to complete the arrangement. But in the end the couple paid far too high price for their million dollars. Their love of money shredded their marriage.

How about what Balaam did for money? His story is recorded in the book of Numbers.

Balaam was a gifted and silver-tongued prophet of God. Balak, king of the Moabites, offered Balaam a huge sum of money to curse the Israelites. The siren song of money caused Balaam to forget his prophetic calling. Balaam was willing to sacrifice his prophetic ministry and his principles to enlarge his net worth.

If you were absolutely sure no one would find out, would you be willing to bend or even break your standards for a million dollars? It's sad but true but Christians compromise their convictions for far less. They cheat on their taxes; fudge their expense accounts; take everything from pens to paper clips to post-it notes from the office. If statistics can be believed, 80% of professing Christians love money so much that they rob God regularly of the tithe that he rightfully deserves. Undeniably, many Christians are willing to sacrifice obedience to God on the altar of material gain.

If we could ask Judas Iscariot today if trading his loyalty to Christ was worth 30 pieces of silver, what do you suppose he'd say?

Scripture provides the answer: "When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the 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 (NIV)

Judas never enjoyed his ill-gotten gain. And the same is true for those who elevate love of money over the love of God. According to Hebrews 11:25, there may be momentary pleasure in sin, but in the end it yields the bitter fruit of misery, pain, and regret.

One sure cure for the love of money is generosity. Give as much of it away as you can. Give to your church. Give to worthy causes. Give to the less fortunate. Generosity is the antidote for the disease of a greedy, grasping, and selfish heart. And in the giving, you'll experience the joy of Jesus who gave everything for our salvation.

Conclusion

Some of you may have been identified with Jesus Christ and his people. But you're not a true believer and you know it. Like Judas you've been leading a double life. It's too late for Judas to repent and turn to Christ. But it's not too late for you. Confess your sins. Surrender your life to Christ. A life committed to Christ will never have to weep at the end of the day about "what might have been."