

Living a Lie

The Master Disciple Maker – Part VII

Selected Scripture

Introduction

Turn to Matthew, chapter 10, please. We will take our last look at one of the disciples as we focus on them and then, go from there.

Benedict Arnold was a prosperous businessman, a natural leader, and an obvious choice to be the captain of the Connecticut state militia. He proved to be such a good military leader that he was promoted to Brigadier General. He was on his way, on a fast track, to becoming one of the leaders in the forces of America as they fought for their liberty. He was, in fact, a loyal Patriot, until 1779, according to historical accounts.

We learn from these accounts that Congress created five new generalships. For some reason, although from what we read, we can assume it was political, Benedict Arnold was passed over and did not receive one of these five. He became so incensed and so angry that he seethed and was going to quit his commission. Another general, however, by the name of George Washington, talked his friend, Benedict, into staying.

Benedict stayed, but planned in his own heart to betray America. He then, worked out a plan with the British forces. He would continue serving and gain the command post of West Point, which he did. The plan was that once obtaining that post, he would deliver West Point over to the British forces. For doing that successfully, he would receive the fee of twenty thousand pounds.

Benedict Arnold's British contact was captured by the American forces and the plot was discovered. Arnold barely escaped with his life on a ship named "The Vulture". And, when we think of Benedict Arnold, we think of a man who was so despicable that he would betray his country.

Judas Iscariot – Living a Lie

Now, there is another traitor that we all know too well. He is another traitor, who surfaces in scripture, and is the most despicable character perhaps, that we could ever study. This man bears a name that no

parent has ever given their child – Judas Iscariot. The name almost hisses like a snake.

There is nothing more tragic than someone who would betray someone else – a country or a person. And let me say this before we jump into Judas' life, betrayal is the logical conclusion of self service. If you are number one, then everyone else must be number two. When the choice has to be made, you will lay down their life for yours. That is how we find Judas Iscariot.

Scene 1 – Judas, the disciple who betrayed Jesus

Now, Judas Iscariot first surfaces, in what we will call scene 1, in Matthew, chapter 10, verse 4, just by name. Let us learn what we can from the list of apostles in this verse. It begins with "Simon, who is called Peter," and then, last on the list, and by the way, always last on the scriptural lists of disciples,

... *Judas Iscariot*, ...

(with this editorial comment),

... *the one who betrayed Him*.

Now, the Greek form of the word "Judas" is "Juda," which could mean, by its Hebrew root, one of two things: "God be praised" or "Jehovah leads". There is, in this man, nothing more despicable than the fact that he is not an object of praise, but is an object of scorn, and that no one has ever been more led not by Jehovah, but by Satan, in New Testament accounts.

Now, "Iscariot" simply identifies the town of Kerioth, which was a town in southern Judea. I would mention that the southern Jews were somewhat intimidating. They were the city dwellers; the educated, as opposed to the rural or Galilean Jew. So Judas, being the only one of the twelve disciples who was a southern Jew, perhaps intimidated his way into becoming the treasurer; the CPA; the controller of this group. We will learn later, why he really wanted that position.

We get a little more information on this traitor in John, chapter 12. The first scene shows Judas

initially cooperating with Jesus' mission, in that he followed Him.

Scene 2 – Judas, the thief

In scene 2, we find Judas openly complaining about a gift for Jesus Christ. Let me open this scene, in John, chapter 12, by telling you that Jesus is at the home of Lazarus and his two sisters, Mary and Martha. They have just finished a meal and Jesus is enjoying the hospitality of this group.

You may remember that Mary then, comes in with a pint of nard or very expensive perfume. She anoints Jesus' feet with it and, with her hair, wipes it away. She is basically performing an extreme act of homage to someone who is, in her mind, a King; she is paying great respect to Jesus.

Now, this is at the end of Jesus' ministry and Judas is about to say the first words recorded from his lips. His words let us know that somewhere along the path, Judas has not bought into the fact that Jesus Christ is worthy of homage; that Jesus Christ is in fact, the King. So, when Mary pours that perfume onto Jesus' feet, Judas speaks, and says in verse 5,

Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and given to poor people?

Now, if we could pull the curtain aside on any hypocrite's life, we would see that they usually complain about something they are really not concerned about. And, Judas could care less about the poor. The next verse gives an explanation. Look at verse 6.

Now he said this, not because he was concerned about the poor, but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box, he used to pilfer what was put into it.

Judas was a thief; he was a pilferer. I do not know how he did it. Can you imagine, these twelve dirt poor disciples who have entrusted to Judas the few shekels that they have, and he is pilfering from the box?! He was a rather low character. Evidently, Judas was so, in a sense, in hatred of Jesus' position or claim to be King that he did not want that kind of homage paid to Him; he hated that.

Now, before we go too far, I do not believe that Judas is really not a trouble maker in this group. I also do not think that Judas was the kind of person who would slip into a church service late or try to remain anonymous or never become involved. Judas was the kind of individual who would be right in the forefront.

You may remember that there were hundreds of people claiming to be Jesus' disciples. Jesus, if you remember, on one occasion, gave the cost of discipleship and everyone, except seventy, left. Then, that number was whittled down to twelve intimate ones – and Judas is one of the twelve.

Judas chose to follow Jesus, knowing what it meant to do so. This man was no sloth; he was right up front. Yet, although he had the outward behavior of a saint, he had the heart of a hypocrite; that is, he was a fake. He was the man best known in the history of mankind, as one whose life was one gigantic lie.

David would write, after he was betrayed by a friend, these words, in chapter 41, verse 9, of the Psalms,

Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.

Jesus would take those words and use them as a fulfillment in this person, Judas. However, He would take out a few key words. He would take out the words "in whom I trusted," because Jesus never trusted Judas. Jesus always knew the heart of Judas, from the very beginning.

Two unanswerable questions

Now, this raises some rather interesting questions that would take a long time to answer. You may smile at that because you know that they are probably unanswerable. However, let me give some comments because I want to go a little deeper before we continue.

1. One question is, "If Judas would betray Jesus and Jesus knew it, why did Jesus choose Judas to be a disciple?"

That is a good question, isn't it? I wish you had not asked!

2. Let me give another question, "If God knew or decreed or planned this betrayal, and in fact, made all of the prophecies related to that betrayal, even to the fact that Judas would sell Jesus for thirty pieces of silver, and then fit Judas into the plan, how could God hold him responsible?"

I want to answer that in three words, "I don't know."

Two suggestions

Let me, however, offer two very weak, finite suggestions that have great theological implications, I believe, where we live every day.

1. The first suggestion is that the power and providence of God can allow a man like Judas to desire to follow Jesus Christ of his own choice, and yet, in the final analysis, be in total fulfillment and agreement with the plan of betrayal.

Does it really “rattle our cages” that there are things about God that we cannot understand; that there are things about His decrees, His election, His predestination that we cannot fathom, and that we cannot seemingly understand in light of human will; free will; the choice to choose Christ? Both are clearly taught in scripture. To deny that God elects is to deny the sovereignty of God and to simply make Him a responder of what we do as human beings. Peter expounds the election like no other. However, free will is also taught clearly in scripture; that you and I have the choice. From our vantage point, we say, “Lord, I choose You.”

Someone said it like this, these two things are like a doorway and we, as unbelievers standing outside the door of salvation, see, over the top of the door, the words, “Whosoever will, may come.” And, we come. We walk through the door and we look back and read the words of I Peter, chapter 1, verse 2, in the King James Version,

Elect according to the foreknowledge of God

...

Warren Wiersbe said that these two great theological truths are like railroad ties. You stand in between those massive metal beams and there is no way that you can humanly bring them together. But, if you will look into the distance, you will see that, just as they disappear into the horizon, those railroad ties have seemingly come together.

You and I will one day understand far more clearly these two great unanswerable truths of scripture. Yet, Judas, fitting into the plan, had initially chosen, and Jesus, knowing he would betray Him, chose him.

There is only one question that you and I must answer, right? It is not necessarily the election, but the question that you and I must answer in our own lives is, “Have we chosen; have we placed our faith in Jesus Christ?”

If we have done so, the other takes care of itself.

2. Let me give one other suggestion that, to me, is the mark of Jesus Christ’s grace. It is that Jesus chose Judas because of the plan, but yet, gave him every opportunity not to fulfill it.

I do not understand that either, but I want to show it to you.

Scene 3 – Judas’ secret conspiracy against Jesus

Turn back to Matthew, chapter 26, and let us take a look at scene 3. This scene reveals Judas secretly conspiring with the religious leaders against Jesus.

Judas has determined now, to sell Christ. Notice verses 14 and 15a,

Then one of the twelve, named Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, “What are you willing to give me to betray Him to you?” . . .

In other words, Judas has come with his cynical, calculating, betraying, deceptive mind to those priests and in effect, said, “What is a betrayal worth to you these days?”

The text tells us, in verse 15b, that they literally, weighed the pieces of silver right then. They had it there and immediately put on thirty pieces and said, “Judas, it’s thirty pieces. How does that sound?”

Judas must have said, “That sounds good,” as his greedy eyes gleamed with desire.

They weighed the silver right there, put it in a pouch, handed it to Judas, and he departed. Then, verse 16 tells us,

From then on he began looking for a good opportunity to betray Jesus.

Scene 4 – Judas’ stubborn plans to betray Jesus

Now, in light of this scene, the next one shows the hardness of Judas’ heart. Turn to John, chapter 13, for scene 4. Look at verses 1 through 5a, which are right after Judas laid out the plan.

Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. During supper, the devil having already . . .

(past tense),

. . . put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Him, Jesus, knowing

that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God, got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself. Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet . . .

Whose feet? Judas' feet! What incredible grace and love. It is hard enough to wash the feet of a friend. It is hard enough to love someone who loves in return. But to love an enemy; to wash the feet of someone that Jesus already knew would turn Him over and betray Him; to watch as Judas goes through with this masquerade, and to love him still, is unbelievable.

What is the source of that kind of strength? These verses tell us. Let us read it again in verse 3.

Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God

The source of strength for that kind of ministry, and for your ministry, is knowing that all things are under the controlling hand of the Father. He is never surprised; He even has knowledge of betrayals. When you know He is in control, you can continue to love and serve.

Where is the source of strength for a parent to love a child who has given their body over to drugs? Where is the source of strength for a husband or wife to forgive an unfaithful spouse? Where is the source of strength to continue to wash feet when your hour is the darkest of your life? Do you know where it is? It is knowing; it is believing that God is in sovereign control.

Now, Judas obviously had the opportunity to repent. In fact, when Jesus was washing his feet, I would have liked to have grabbed him to say, "Judas, now . . . now, just repent! He knows!"

Does Judas repent? Look at verse 21b of John, chapter 13,

. . . Truly, truly, I say to you, that one of you will betray Me.

Then Matthew, chapter 26, verse 22, tells us that all of the disciples come out of their seats and say,

. . . Surely not I, Lord?

After they finish, we are told, in verse 25, that Judas says, and he is quoted,

. . . Surely it is not I, Rabbi? . . .

Now, in that day, you could construct a question that would expect a certain answer, similar to our rhetorical question. This question is constructed in such a way that it is expecting the response, "Well, of course not."

So, the disciples say, in effect, "Lord, You know it isn't me," expecting the Lord to say, "I know that."

Then Judas says, continuing his masquerade, "Lord, You know it isn't me," in the same construction. He was continuing his deceitful masquerade with incredible hardness of heart.

Now, back in John, chapter 13, in verse 24, Simon Peter, whose curiosity nearly kills him, gestures to John and says,

. . . Tell us who it is of whom He is speaking.

In other words, he whispers, "Psst, hey John, you're sitting there by his right hand, find out who it is. I'm going to ring his neck."

That is in the margin of my Bible!

Evidently, Jesus reveals it to John in the next phrase. I believe that phrase is to John, so John knew.

Then, it goes on to tell us that Jesus gave the sop to Judas. The sop is a piece of bread mixed into a pastry dish of fruit and nuts. The person to the host's left had the honored position and it was to that person that the host would give the sop. This indicates that Judas was to His left, which indicates that Jesus had given Judas the position of honor; which indicates incredible love. I think perhaps, He gave Judas all the opportunity in the world to say, "Lord, You know. Would You forgive me?"

John is to Jesus' right, the one He loves. Judas is to Jesus' left, the one who hates Him.

Scene 5 – Judas' betrayal of Jesus in the garden

Turn to Matthew, chapter 26, for scene 5. We come to the garden scene. You may know the story well. Look at verse 49.

Immediately Judas went to Jesus and said, "Hail, Rabbi!" and kissed Him.

The tense of that language is continuous; that is, Judas showered Jesus with kisses. What a brazen, obnoxious action by Judas. Continue to verse 50.

And Jesus said to him, . . .

"Traitor!"

No,

And Jesus said to him, "Friend . . ."

Friend?!

. . . *“Friend, do what you have come for.”* . . .

.

This was again, Jesus’ reach of grace to Judas that was still spurned.

Scene 6 – Judas’ remorse and hanging of himself

Scene 6 is across the page in Matthew, chapter 27. Judas tragically cancels any potential for hope. Look at verses 1 through 6.

Now when morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus to put Him to death; and they bound Him, and led Him away and delivered Him to Pilate the governor. Then when Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that He had been condemned, he felt remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.” But they said, “What is that to us? See to that yourself!” And he threw the pieces of silver into the temple sanctuary and departed; and he went away and hanged himself.

Let me point out a couple of things for you to notice in these verses. First, notice Judas’ remorse. It says in the text that “he felt remorse”. He must have been reckless with his agony and guilt because we are told that he ran into the “naos”; that is, the inner sanctum. No one other than a religious leader or priest, was allowed in there. But, Judas goes into the inner sanctum with his thirty pieces of silver and says, “I have done a terrible thing, I want to undo it. Here’s your money back.”

They scorn him and mock him and he sends those coins flinging and ringing across the temple floor. Then, he runs out, filled with remorse; that is, regret that he has done something terrible. Because of his words, an innocent man will die.

Notice that Judas never gives allegiance to Jesus as Christ, but as an innocent man. Judas never thought they would kill Him. Judas thought Jesus was nothing more than an innocent man, who was perhaps, deluded in His messianic claim. He thought that somehow, they would let Him go away as some deluded maniac. He finds out they are really going to kill Him and he says, “Oh, I have done the wrong thing. I’ve got to re-do this.”

Of course, they will not take the money back. And, the text says, “he went away and hanged himself.”

Judas had remorse, which is different from repentance. Remorse always leads to despair; it is an overwhelming sense of wrong and guilt. Repentance leads to Christ, where hope can be found; it is productive. Peter denied Christ, but repented and found hope. Judas denied Christ and was filled with remorse, but never repented and found death. Judas was motivated by Satan.

I read one commentator who wrote these startling words, “Remember, Satan always pays his servants their wages, and the wages of sin is death.”

Notice in Matthew, we are told that Judas hanged himself to death. In Acts, chapter 1, verse 18, there is a rather confusing passage that says Judas,

. . . falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his intestines gushed out.

I believe the answer is in the Greek word, which is “apagchomai”. This word could be translated “he strangled himself”. It is used in the ancient manuscripts for a man who climbed to the pinnacle of a hill, took off his belt or girdle, and tied one end around his neck and the other end around a rock, and then, jumped over the edge. This suggests that Judas climbed to a pinnacle and Acts, chapter 1, gives us the grizzly details. Evidently, that belt or girdle snapped and Judas fell to the ground below. One fragment of an ancient manuscript tells us that Judas fell to a stony road and was disemboweled by a passing wagon.

Application

When we come to the end of a story like this, it marks us. Let me draw the strings together in two ways.

To the unbeliever – it is possible to serve Christ without knowing Him

I want to apply Judas’ life first, to the unbeliever. He is a tragic example of someone so close to the truth of God without ever accepting the truth of God. Imagine his privileges! He walked with Christ; he was discipled by Christ! He saw Christ and heard Him teach! He knew Him better than perhaps any, other than the twelve! But, although he was associated with Jesus Christ, he never accepted Jesus Christ.

Ladies and gentlemen, I believe there are people who will find hell, even though they have come to church. They will end in an eternity of fire and hell, even though they knew the scriptures; even though they knew about Christ; even though they knew the plan. There are, I believe, many religious people headed for hell. Why? Because, although they knew certain things, they never received as their own, Christ as Savior.

Matthew, chapter 7, verse 21a, broadens this application. Jesus says,

Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven . . .

Those who were standing before Him, when He spoke these words, said, according to verse 22, "Lord, wait a second,"

. . . did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?

Jesus will then respond, in verse 23, with the terrible words,

. . . I never knew you; depart from Me . . .

It is possible to serve Him without knowing Him. This is simply because people serve Him for many reasons. Judas was following Jesus because he thought that He was the person to follow. Perhaps Judas initially believed that Jesus was the Messiah and that He would give him a place in the kingdom. Then Jesus started talking about death and Judas would have none of that. So, Judas staked his claim to try to re-capture something of what he had given up for three years. That was at least thirty pieces of silver.

Do you know Jesus?

To the believer – it is possible to be confronted with the truth of God without ever applying it

I want to apply this, finally, to the believer. That is difficult because I believe Judas was an unbeliever. This application captivates my thinking. It is possible to be confronted with the truth of God, as a believer, without ever applying the truth of God.

Think of the sermons that Judas heard. Think of the scriptures that were open to Judas, at Jesus' own hand. Think of the way that Judas, perhaps initially, even knew the Law – to follow Jesus, he must have. He had seen; he had walked; he had heard, but had never applied it. He had heard more talk about the judgment than heaven; Christ talked more about hell than heaven. He had heard it all.

Where was Judas? I think he was right there. I think he was listening. But, he never applied it to the person sitting in his own seat.

It is possible, ladies and gentlemen, for you and I, who know Christ, to hear the truths of scripture, to be in the word, to learn it, and say, "That applies to someone other than me."

To learn scripture and refuse to apply it is a very tragic mistake. I am convinced that the Bible is relevant to every arena of life. As your teacher, I do not make this Book relevant, it already is. We just discover how it is, together.

The question is, "Do you and I, as we learn, apply the scripture? Do we inculcate it into our lives and our personalities? Do we say, 'Lord, I want You to teach me by Your Spirit. I want You to disciple me by Your Spirit. I never want to remain the same. I commit myself to You.'"

I pray that that is your heart's desire.