

The Anatomy of a False Disciple

Mark 14:1 After two days it was the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take Him by trickery and put Him to death. 2 But they said, "Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar of the people." 3 And being in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, as He sat at the table, a woman came having an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard. Then she broke the flask and poured it on His head. 4 But there were some who were indignant among themselves, and said, "Why was this fragrant oil wasted? 5 "For it might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor." And they criticized her sharply. 6 But Jesus said, "Let her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a good work for Me. 7 "For you have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good; but Me you do not have always. 8 "She has done what she could. She has come beforehand to anoint My body for burial. 9 "Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her." 10 Then Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Him to them.

11 And when they heard it, they were glad, and promised to give him money. So he sought how he might conveniently betray Him. 12 Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they killed the Passover lamb, His disciples said to Him, "Where do You want us to go and prepare, that You may eat the Passover?" 13 And He sent out two of His disciples and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him. 14 "Wherever he goes in, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?"' 15 "Then he will show you a large upper room, furnished and prepared; there make ready for us." 16 So His disciples went out, and came into the city, and found it just as He had said to them; and they prepared the Passover. 17 In the evening He came with the twelve. 18 Now as they sat and ate, Jesus said, "Assuredly, I say to you, one of you who eats with Me will betray Me." 19 And they began to be sorrowful, and to say to Him one by one, "Is it I?" And another said, "Is it I?" 20 He answered and said to them, "It is one of the twelve, who dips with Me in the dish. "The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had never been born."

During the 1980s, one of the commodore's in the South African navy was arrested. His name was Dieter Gerhardt, and he was the commander of the Simon's Town naval base. But in 1983, following information from a Soviet defector, he was arrested. He had actually been a spy for the Soviet Union, passing on the most sensitive information about our military to another nation. From the point of view of the government of the time, he was a traitor. He was tried for high treason, convicted, and imprisoned.

One of the most famous traitors in all of recorded history is Judas. There really has never been a worse betrayal, because the evil of the betrayal is measured by who was betrayed. To have betrayed the perfect, innocent, sinless Son of God qualifies as the worst betrayal of history, because the One Judas betrayed had done no evil. Betraying a nation with its own faults is one thing, but betraying the One who has never wronged you and never wronged anyone is as bad as it gets.

Judas is an extreme example, but Judas is an example of a false disciple. Judas illustrates something which happens to this day: people who claim to be with Jesus, and look as if they are His disciples, but all along, they are false. They have no allegiance to Christ, no genuine relationship with Him, and when the time is right, they will abandon Him, turn from Him, and reveal that they were never in His team.

False discipleship is as much a problem as ever before. Let's study this account of the betrayal of Jesus Christ by Judas, to learn more about our Lord and His grace, and to see the signs of a false disciple.

I. The Making of a False Disciple

To understand how you end up with a Judas, we need to rewind the tape. It's common for people to think that Judas loved and trusted Christ at the beginning and then changed his mind. But the Bible tells us something else. In John 6 we have the account of the feeding of the 5000,

From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. Then Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?" But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. "Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?" He spoke of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, for it was he who would betray Him, being one of the twelve. (Joh 6:66-71)

This is significant for two reasons. First, Jesus says clearly that one of the twelve is (at the time of speaking) a devil. He did not say, 'shall become' or 'will turn into'. He says, 'One of you is a devil.' Second, this miracle took place fairly early in the ministry of Christ – about 18 months into His three year ministry. He probably chose the twelve somewhere around 8 months into His public ministry, so they have been with him for less than a year when this is spoken. This is early days, and right at the start, Judas is a devil, an adversary, an evil-doer.

Nowhere in Scripture do we read of a time when Judas repented of his sins and believed in Christ. Nowhere do we read of his turning to the Lord. When Jesus chose Judas, He knew what He was getting. He knew what Judas was at the time.

Judas was an unbeliever. He had never come under the lordship of Christ, been born again, and experienced new life and forgiveness.

Now that doesn't mean Judas did not do great things. When Jesus sent out the twelve, Judas was among them. And Mark 6 tells us:

¹³ *And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick, and healed them. (Mar 6:13)*

Did Judas do that? Yes, he did. Well, doesn't that mean he was a truly, born again believer? No, it doesn't. Miraculous signs are never proof of genuine faith in Christ.

"Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' (Mat 7:22-23)

So why was Judas there? Judas was there for the same reason that every false disciple hangs around church, and God's people. Judas was there for his own advantage. He was there to get all the benefits and advantages and selfish enhancements that associating with Jesus would provide. Judas was there not to take up a cross, but to receive a crown, not to be humbled, but to be exalted.

At the very onset of Jesus' ministry, Judas, like the other 11, assumed that when Jesus told them to go and preach the kingdom, it meant He would soon be using His miraculous power to set up His political kingdom in Jerusalem, ruling over the Gentile nations. They saw only coming glory, not suffering. They saw great honour, not shame. They saw great power, not weakness. And when they saw the miracles, they must have thought that Jesus was unstoppable. Of course He was. But He was unbending in His desire to do the Father's will, which was at that time, not a crown, but a cross.

Every false disciple comes to Jesus, and the things of God because he or she sees something that

will really benefit him. And there's nothing wrong with seeing the reward or the goodness or the beauty of Christ and the Gospel, but the difference between a false disciple and a true disciple is that the false disciple has never counted the cost. He sees that Jesus will meet his needs, provide him with a better life materially, and give him friendships and relationships, and ensure promotion and success, and then to crown it all, he gets Heaven when he dies. The false disciple sees that Jesus is the massive supplier and thinks he is a recipient who gets it all.

He doesn't understand that even though the Gospel is free, there is a cost. And when he hears about the cost, that is often...

II. The Breaking of a False Disciple (various, vv1-10)

We wonder when cracks began to show in Judas. At what point did he begin to get concerned that this kingdom of splendour and wealth might not come about just as he had thought.

Probably the very early disputes with the Pharisees were the first sign. Judas must have scratched his head. Why is Jesus arguing, and publicly arguing, with these men? These people are the keys to ruling most of the population. The Pharisees controlled the synagogues, and Jewish life was centred around the synagogue. If you offend the synagogue rulers, you're locking yourself out of the nation.

But perhaps Judas watched and saw that the common people enjoyed Christ's teaching. He probably reasoned Jesus had enough power to remove those Pharisees.

But then, Judas was there when Jesus gave people these hard demands. When false or casual, or frivolous disciples came to Jesus, He would clothe the Gospel, call in some hard call to repentance, a demand that the person stop serving himself and follow Christ.

⁵⁷ *Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, "Lord, I will follow You wherever You go."*

⁵⁸ *And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."*

⁵⁹ *Then He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father."*

⁶⁰ *Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God."*

⁶¹ *And another also said, "Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house."*

⁶² *But Jesus said to him, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."*

He told the rich young ruler to go and sell all he had and follow Christ. You have to wonder what Judas thought and felt when he saw this. Jesus had chosen Judas, but here Jesus was almost turning people away, saying, you can't use Me as a means to your own ends. You either lose your life to gain mine, or you choose to keep your own life, but then you can't have Christ.

Here was Judas, all along, using Jesus for the chance for power, for the chance for money, and watching and listening while Jesus told people that commitment to Him was radical, selfless. To come to Jesus is to die to yourself, so that His resurrection life lives in you.

To a false disciple, this must have been like a thorn in his side, irritating, irking. Every lesson must have reminded him that he did not have that kind of commitment. He had been drafted into service, but he did not want to give it all up for the Person of Jesus.

Then, what must have been a game-changer was in the last year of Christ's life, as He began to

foretell His own death by crucifixion. He began to prepare the twelve, telling them that He would be rejected and murdered.

I imagine the hard and false heart of Judas becoming more and more bitter. He had come for glory and power, not for the shame of crucifixion. And now those kingdom promises seemed to be going down in flames. I picture him beginning to seethe in anger, become more and more disillusioned, more and more alienated from the others. His thwarted ambitions turned into hatred, and as Jesus kept predicting His own suffering, Judas began to wonder how he could get out, and still get some of the money he lusted for.

The breaking point for Judas was this scene in Bethany. Here this woman, who was apparently Mary, sister of Martha, came and poured upon Jesus a very expensive gift of perfume. And if you go to John's Gospel, you'll find out who it was that complained about this gift being poured on Jesus and not sold.

Then one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, who would betray Him, said, "Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it. But Jesus said, "Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial. "For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always." (Joh 12:4-8)

For Judas, this was absolute breaking point. Here were the two idols of his heart – money and power, dashed. He wanted money, so he complains, using the pretext of helping the poor. Jesus defends her extravagant gift and publicly rebukes Judas' false piety. Jesus then reminds Judas of the truth again: I am going to die, and be buried. Her gift will serve that purpose. I am not going to a throne, Judas, I am going to a cross.

This was the last straw, and Judas went out to betray Jesus. In fact, Luke's Gospel tells us:

³ *Then Satan entered Judas, surnamed Iscariot, who was numbered among the twelve. (Luk 22:3 NKJ)*

Judas was a living parable of the second and third types of soil in Christ's parable.

"These likewise are the ones sown on stony ground who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness; "and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word's sake, immediately they stumble. "Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word, "and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. (Mar 4:16-19 NKJ)

The false disciple enjoys some of the buzz, and popularity and the feel-good factor of being connected or associated with religion, with Christianity. But the acid test is this: if it looks like he has to lose, to suffer, to repent, to die to some things, to give up, and that all the gaining will have to be a matter of trust and faith, and some of it might not even be seen in this life, he wants to get out. The plant dies.

Once that heart has recognised it hates the things of God, what follows is a process of deceit and ultimately, denial.

III. The Faking and Forsaking of a False Disciple (v10-20)

Mark 14:1 *After two days it was the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take Him by trickery and put Him to death. 2 But they said, "Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar of the people."*

10 Then Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Him to them.

11 And when they heard it, they were glad, and promised to give him money. So he sought how he might conveniently betray Him.

The Sanhedrin, the collections of scribes and priests, Pharisees and Sadducees, met to decide how to destroy Jesus. But at this stage, they weren't sure how to do it. He was in Jerusalem, so this was their best chance to seize Him. At the same time, they'd seen the crowds shout "Hosanna" as He rode into Jerusalem, so they were nervous of arresting Him publicly during the Feast of Passover.

They couldn't have been happier when Judas walked in and offered to betray Jesus, for money. Judas knew the movements, the meeting places, and he could aid them in a secret arrest, and secret trial.

In this place of deep hypocrisy, and hatred, Judas had decided that if he could not get kingdom glory out of Jesus, he was at least going to cash out, and get some money out of the deal. If Jesus was going to go and get himself killed and destroy all their messianic hopes, then Judas was at least going to get some cash while he could.

What happens next is a kind of cat-and-mouse game between Judas and Jesus. Jesus knows that Judas has betrayed Him, but Judas doesn't know. So Jesus keeps his movements secret so that he can buy time with His apostles. He does not tell them all where they will be having the Passover Meal, otherwise Judas will betray that location to the rulers. Instead, Jesus pre-arranged with some people, and sends just two disciples off to get things ready.

2 Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they killed the Passover lamb, His disciples said to Him, "Where do You want us to go and prepare, that You may eat the Passover?" 13 And He sent out two of His disciples and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him. 14 "Wherever he goes in, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?"' 15 "Then he will show you a large upper room, furnished and prepared; there make ready for us." 16 So His disciples went out, and came into the city, and found it just as He had said to them; and they prepared the Passover. 17 In the evening He came with the twelve.

It may be that Jesus used His divine omniscience and power to set up this meeting with a man carrying water. It is also possible that it was a pre-arranged sign, since women usually carried pitchers of water, so a man doing so would have been a kind of landmark. And we have some reason to believe that the owner of this home was in fact the father of John Mark, the author of this Gospel. It was in Jerusalem, it was a wealthy home, and later in this chapter, we meet a young, unnamed man who has to flee near naked from the soldiers, and we think that this was Mark himself.

When they arrive, we learn from some of the other Gospels that they are having one of their favourite discussions, who is going to be greatest in the kingdom. They recline around a u-shaped table, with the upper part of the body resting on the left arm, the head raised, and the legs and feet stretched out behind him, with pillows behind the back for extra comfort. So in this position, the head of one guest is opposite the chest of another, so if he wants to say something quietly, he just leans back and speaks in a whisper, or even rests his head on the other's chest – a token of affection.

Judas is at the table, and it seems Jesus seated him in the place of honour. And now Jesus makes an announcement to the twelve.

18 Now as they sat and ate, Jesus said, "Assuredly, I say to you, one of you who eats with Me will betray Me." 19 And they began to be sorrowful, and to say to Him one by one, "Is it I?" And another said, "Is it I?"

20 He answered and said to them, "It is one of the twelve, who dips with Me in the dish. "The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had never been born."

Jesus lets the twelve know that one has already betrayed Him, Jesus knows that Judas went to the Sanhedrin, probably on Tuesday night, and it is now Thursday. The responses are interesting. They all are horrified and shocked. They ask Jesus, "Is it I?" And as they were doing this, who was also doing that? Do you think Judas just sat there quietly? No, he played the part of the shocked, innocent disciple - "Is it I?". It's also amazing to think of how gracious Jesus had been to Judas. None of the other eleven had picked up on any unkind treatment of Judas by Jesus. They did not detect any change in Christ's treatment of any of them.

I think Jesus is giving Judas another chance. He is exposing the sin, while still keeping Judas anonymous. He is warning Judas, and calling on him to repent. So much so, that putting the Gospel accounts together, we read that Peter motioned to John, who was leaning on Jesus, to find out who it was. Jesus dipped bread and handed Judas the choice morsel, the best part of the meal, extending to Judas one more act of kindness, of grace, of mercy.

In that moment, did Judas have a choice? Could Judas have chosen to not go and betray Jesus? Yes. Jesus brings together divine sovereignty and human responsibility in verse 20. The Son of Man is going to follow the path sovereignly appointed, which included betrayal, but the man who chooses to betray Jesus has chosen to do so; it is his own choice, and woe to him, It would have been better had he never been born.

And once that hard heart has made up his mind, he gets up to go, and Christ's last words are, "What you're about to do, do quickly." Still the disciples do not know that Judas is the betrayer, but once he is out the room, Jesus seems to express relief, and goes on to institute the Lord's Supper, for the true disciples.

How hardened is the heart of Judas? He goes to tell the Sanhedrin where Jesus is. But Jesus has bought himself time. With Judas out the room, Jesus institutes the Lord's Supper, and then gives His disciples His last instructions, recorded in John 14, 15, and 16. To buy himself more time, He heads to Gethsemane. Judas no doubt arrived at the Upper Room, found it empty, and then guessed that Gethsemane would be where they could find him.

⁴² "Rise, let us be going. See, My betrayer is at hand." And Immediately, while He was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, with a great multitude with swords and clubs, came from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. Now His betrayer had given them a signal, saying, "Whomever I kiss, He is the One; seize Him and lead Him away safely." As soon as He had come, immediately Judas went up to Him and said to Him, "Rabbi, Rabbi!" and kissed Him. Then they laid their hands on Him and took Him. (Mar 14:42-46 NKJ)

And of all things, Judas had told the soldiers, who would not have recognised Jesus, that he would come out of hiding, kiss Jesus, and then they should come out and arrest him,

After all that wicked hardening of the heart, did Judas repent? Did Judas turn to the saving grace of Christ? Did he, like Peter after his denial, repent and seek forgiveness?

³ Then Judas, His betrayer, seeing that He had been condemned, was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders,

⁴ saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." And they said, "What is that to us? You see to it!"

⁵ Then he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself. (Mat

27:3-5)

He was remorseful, but not repentant.

Judas is a powerful warning about ignoring your conscience. It begins with thinking you can keep Jesus orbiting your own life, and not bow the knee. Imagine that Jesus is one more way to make your own life what you want it be. And every time you hear a sermon about commitment, about humbling yourself, and about giving your all to Christ, you harden, and rationalise it away, and insist on keeping what is yours. Get angry and blame the messenger, when you're told that following Christ is all or nothing. Then play along, and speak the lingo, and sing the songs, and make out that you feel and know and do what a disciple does. And while you sense a growing distance between what the Word says, and what you are, just keep ignoring that. Rationalise it.

And as the internal deadness becomes bigger, the outward mask becomes like a thin shell over the inner emptiness. At some point, it will crack. And by then, pray your conscience is not so scarred and hardened, that you cannot repent even then.

Instead, examine yourself whether you be in the faith. If you have doubts, rather address them honestly, than continuing to wear a mask.

Keep short accounts before God. Be like Paul, who said:

Acts 23:1: Then Paul, looking earnestly at the council, said, "Men *and* brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day." (Act 23:1 NKJ)