

## Was Judas Saved? Lost Salvation or False Believer?

Was Judas saved? In the debate surrounding eternal security, Judas' name frequently comes up. Here is a man who clearly went to hell, and yet was an apostle. Was he saved or not? Did he lose his salvation? Is he an illustration of a believer who 'falls away'? Or is he a picture of those who profess to be saved, but never repent?

I believe the Bible teaches that Judas is an example of a false believer. Scriptural evidence leans on the side of Judas never having been saved, and harmonises with the Scriptural teaching of eternal security. See, many today are nervous when they hear the phrase, '*once saved, always saved.*' They think this is a heresy that gives people a false hope of heaven.

In truth, though, eternal security is a Biblical doctrine. And Scripture makes it very clear that if a believer is truly saved, they will not lose their salvation. However, some have warped this doctrine. They have taken it to mean that if you at some point in your life made a profession of faith – that you can now know without a doubt that you are saved.

In other words, they look back at the memory of having prayed a prayer, gone forward in an invitation, or done something in their past, as the ground of their salvation. The memory of that event gives them assurance. But this is unscriptural. The Bible never tells us to gain assurance from the memory of a profession. The Bible tells us to gain assurance of salvation by our works.

Now, let's emphasise: works cannot save you. Moreover, there should be the memory of an event in your life where you received Christ if you claim to be one of His. But the Bible is clear – assurance of salvation comes from the fruit your life is producing, not from the memory of a profession of faith. You know you're saved not because you remember doing something back in your teens, but because as you examine your life, you see the fruit one expects from the Holy Spirit living inside someone.

You can think of it like this: to find out if a tree has life inside it – you look for fruit. The absence of fruit shows the tree is dead. Life produces fruit. It is not that the tree died because of a lack of fruit. Fruit does not produce life – life produces fruit. In the same way – good works do not keep us saved, or provide us with security for salvation. That much is secured by the final payment of Christ in the cross. But to know if Christ truly dwells within me – I must look for outward evidence.

To put it simply: good works are not the basis for salvation, but they are the evidence that it has occurred. A lack of works, on the other hand, is not the basis for losing one's salvation (which cannot happen); it is proof salvation never occurred.

The whole book of 1 John is written to tell believers what eternal life looks like in a person – love of the brethren, obedience to God's commands, love of God. John does not say that you can have assurance because you remember a profession. John says, if you see these things in your life – then your profession was genuine, and you may know that you have eternal life.

John had a two-fold purpose in writing – to assure those who saw the fruit of the Spirit in their lives, and to warn and shock those who did not, but still considered themselves saved. James wrote with the same purpose – to warn people that faith produces fruit, or else it was not faith to begin with. Peter wanted people to make their calling and election sure – by examining their lives.

In fact, look through the New Testament for the words “*be not deceived*” or “*let no man deceive you,*” and the following verses almost always have to do with the fact that the saved live holy lives as evidence of their salvation – and the unsaved live ungodly lives as evidence of their lostness.

These New Testament writers are concerned with people being deceived – having false assurance – because they think a profession saved them. If it was genuine, it did – but if it was not, then it did not. That is why Scripture instructs us then to look for fruits in keeping with faith in Christ to make sure the faith was genuine to begin with.

The character of Judas is a perfect example of a false profession of faith. From him, we can observe some important distinctions about false and saving faith.

### **Being in religious service is not saving faith**

Judas was among the apostles. He was personally chosen by Jesus. He walked with Jesus as long as the others did. People make the mistake of assuming that because Judas held the office of apostle, he was necessarily saved.

Therefore, their logic goes, the fact that he went to hell means people can lose their salvation). After all, Judas cast out demons, preached the gospel of the kingdom, did miracles and mighty acts in Jesus’ name (**Luke 10:17**). The logic assumes that the office, and the power that accompanied the office, proves that Judas must have experienced the saving grace of God at some point.

However, Scripture teaches the very opposite. Indeed, we find many holding offices in Scripture who were clearly unbelievers. Balaam held the office of prophet. **Numbers 22** has the Lord speaking to Balaam as if he were a dear child of God. God speaks through him, and clearly Balaam knew of Yahweh, the true God. However, the fact that Balaam was unsaved is proven on two points – he was destroyed by the Israelites when they entered Canaan (**Joshua 13:22**), and he is mentioned as a false prophet in **Jude**. Jude regards false prophets as “*sensual, having not the Spirit*” (**Jude 11:19**).

There are also clearly examples of unsaved men who held the office of priest. Eli’s sons, Hophni and Phinehas, ministered as priests, but the Bible could not be clearer about their spiritual state: “*Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial; they knew not the LORD*” (**1 Samuel 2:12**). And the Old Testament is full of examples of men who held the office of king but were wicked and clearly unbelievers. Clearly, God chose to anoint, and sometimes use, unconverted men in the offices of prophet, priest, and king.

Carrying this over into the New Testament, we can easily see the parallels. God could use an unsaved man as an apostle as easily as he used unsaved men as prophets, priests, and kings. The Bible makes no causal link between office and conversion.

For that matter, it is doubtful if all the other eleven apostles were saved when Jesus called them to the office of apostle. At what point do these men actually come to salvation? Perhaps some, like Matthew, repented on the very day they were called. However, we find some of them still asking questions like, “*What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?*” (**Matthew 8:27**). Clearly, at this early stage of Jesus’ ministry, they have not all grasped His deity.

By the third year of Jesus’ ministry, we at least know Peter has understood from his response to Jesus’ question: “*He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God*” (**Matthew 16:15-16**).

So we can by no means say that Jesus chose men who were saved to be apostles. It seems more likely that some got saved when they were called, and others during the course of Jesus' ministry. Understanding this, it is already clear that one of them might simply have never come to faith.

### **Doing religious works is not saving faith**

To underline this fact, we must also recognise that the presence of power is also no evidence of salvation. Judas' casting out of demons or healing the sick is no proof of a work of grace in his heart. As Jesus Himself said:

*Not everyone that saith unto me, "Lord, Lord," shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? And in Thy name have cast out devils? And in Thy name done many wonderful works?" And then will I profess unto them, "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."*

**Matthew 7:21-23**

### **Agreeing about Christ's deity is not saving faith**

The Gospel of John gives us fascinating insight into the true nature of Judas. This we should find as no surprise, since the apostle John was the first to be told who the traitor among the twelve would be (**John 13:23-26**). The first, and most revealing text of John's on Judas is found in chapter 6:

*Then Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the Living God." Jesus answered them, "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?" He spake of Judas Iscariot the son of Simon: for he it was that should betray Him, being one of the twelve.*

**John 6:68-71**

Notice firstly, Peter's confession of faith in Christ. Remarkably, Jesus' reply has to do with the genuineness of the conversion of the twelve. It is as if he uses Peter's response to state, 'Yes, that's an orthodox remark. You are all nodding, but one of you is not saved.' John provides us with the commentary on who Jesus was speaking of – Judas Iscariot.

And when Peter said, "*we believe that Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God,*" I'm sure Judas nodded. Judas had a head knowledge agreement that Jesus was the Messiah – he certainly had seen enough miracles in front of his very eyes to believe it. But Judas never exercised biblical faith. He had the same kind of belief as the demons. As **James 2:19** tells us: "*Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.*" There is an agreement with facts that is not biblical faith.

Appropriate then, that Jesus should say, "*One of you is a devil.*" One of you has a devil's faith: you agree with some facts about God and salvation, but you have not embraced it by faith. The word for devil is the same Greek word used for demons, or for the Devil himself (*diabolos*). To refer to someone as a devil is hardly a way of indicating a believer who is simply prone to falling. It suggests an unredeemed nature: "*Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do*" (**John 8:44**).

Notice also that Jesus' words confirm the thesis we are working with. Election to an office does not mean the heart has been saved. Jesus' words are literally, "*Have not I, you the twelve chosen out,*

*and out of you one is a devil?"* Jesus selected the twelve out of many others, but not because they were saved. Christ's own words confirm this: *"One of you is a devil."* The verb there is present simple tense – Judas was unsaved when Jesus said this. Judas was not passively losing his salvation, nor was this something to happen in the future. Judas was in active unbelief when Jesus spoke these words.

So when did Jesus speak these words? **John 6** is most likely found in Jesus second year of ministry. Therefore, those who suggest Judas lost his salvation must find grounds for this fall from grace to have occurred within the first or second year of Christ's ministry. It is far more plausible to see that Judas had never repented, and by this time, was still, *"a devil."*

### **An unchanged life is not saving faith**

The incident in John 12 further confirms our view of the man as an unbeliever because of John's inspired commentary. After Mary anointed Jesus' feet, we read, *"Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him, 'Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?' This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein" (John 12:4-6).*

John does not mince words here. Judas was a thief. He was not a good believer tempted with covetousness – he was a thief. He had the pattern of unrepentant sin that makes one 'classed' as an unbeliever: *"Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." (1 Corinthians 6:9-10).*

Do believers commit any of these sins? Yes, but believers must not be marked by patterns of unrepentant, habitual sin that would make them thieves, drunkards, revilers, and so on. If this is true, they are not losing their salvation, they are signifying the absence of it at all. This is what John means when he writes, *"We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not" (1 John 5:18).*

This would be a contradiction of **1 John 1:8**, unless we understood it in the sense we are speaking of. No believer should be habitually sinning in an area to where they could be classified as an adulterer – i.e., an unrepentant, habitually immoral person. John says that such a person is not saved, and was never saved. And such is John's description of Judas – he was a thief. His knowledge of Christ had not changed his life or saved his soul.

A true believer might have a besetting sin; but they are fighting it, they are struggling with it, they want to be free of it. For that reason, Paul continues, *"And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:11).*

### **True saving faith means Satan does not have power over you**

John further cements our belief that Judas was unsaved by telling us of the spiritual realities going on behind the scenes the night Jesus ate the Last Supper with His disciples: *"And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him..." (John 13:2)* This is no statement to be glossed over. Satan does not have this free reign with the children of God.

**1 John 5:18** explicitly says *“he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.”* For Satan to have entered Judas so easily suggests something more than temptation. Yes, Peter was rebuked as “Satan” for trying to steer Jesus off the Calvary road, but Scripture does not say that Satan entered Peter. Here Satan enters Judas, in the way a demon possesses a man.

Sure, the Holy Spirit would only come to indwell at Pentecost, but for Satan to enter so easily reflects that this was one of his children: *“And when he had dipped the sop, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. And after the sop Satan entered into him” (John 13:26-27).*

### **Saving faith cleans a soul in God’s eyes**

Notice Christ’s words after Peter asks Jesus to wash all of him: *“Jesus saith to him, ‘He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all.’ For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean” (John 13:10-11).*

In crystal clear terms, Judas is said to be unclean – unwashed from his sins. Christ’s very point to Peter is that once salvation has occurred – like a bath, there needs only be confession and cleansing (**1 John 1:9**) – akin to the washing of feet. Jesus reassures Peter that he and the others have experienced that total ‘cleansing’ or washing of salvation, except for one. One of them is unclean. This point can’t be overemphasised.

Had Judas been a believer who was erring, he would rank among the clean, who just required ‘foot-washing’ in the spiritual sense. He would be a believer tempted to sin. Instead, Christ says he has never received the initial cleansing of salvation at all. Saving faith means a person is forgiven in God’s eyes – and simply requires the open and honest relationship of confessing when they go wrong. But a false profession of faith means that the initial bath of salvation has never taken place at all, and they have not been saved.

### **False faith comes close, but misses the mark**

Our next stop is the book of Acts for the Spirit-filled teaching of Peter on Judas. Peter says of him, *“For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry” (Acts 1:17).* Peter says literally, ‘he was counted among our number, and had obtained a share in this ministry or service.’ Now, nothing in that speaks of Judas’ salvation, only of his office. **Acts 1:20** speaks of another taking Judas’ *“overship.”* He had an office of leadership, and one had to replace him. The real clincher of a verse is in verse **25**:

*“...That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.”*

**Acts 1:25**

Firstly, Judas fell from *“this ministry and apostleship.”* His falling is from a position, not from salvation, for he never had it. Secondly, the word *“fell”* literally means ‘to go by the side of, to go past or pass over without touching a thing.’ That sounds like a case of ‘so near, yet so far.’ Judas went past, without actually touching. He professed faith, without ever having possessed faith.

The verse then says Judas was to *“go to his own place.”* What place is that? Hell is obviously meant. Judas missed the mark, by unbelief. He came close, but never actually repented. His choosing to an office was not proof of salvation. By the second year of ministry, he was still not saved. By the third

year of ministry, he was still *“a thief.”* Satan entered him as one of his own. Even when repentant over Jesus’ betrayal – it was not repentance unto life. Judas felt the sorrow of the world – inner self-pity and guilt, without submission to God.

True saving faith is a coming to Christ. It does not merely believe facts about Him; it repents from sin and turns to Him and embraces Him for all He is. Saving faith is taking Christ as your new life, receiving Him as Saviour, Lord, righteousness, forgiveness, eternal life and everything else He is. See, Judas wanted Jesus as a political Messiah, and when that did not materialise, he rejected everything. That is not saving faith.

Saving faith says with Peter, *“Lord, to whom shall we go – you alone have the words of eternal life.”* It is a full and complete surrender, a total turning over of the life into Christ’s hands. What a frightening warning – that one so close to Jesus could have missed Jesus entirely. Being involved in religious work didn’t save him. Doing religious acts, even with miraculous power, didn’t save him. Agreeing with some facts about Jesus didn’t save him.

No, his life did not change: evidence that he was never saved. Had he been truly saved, Christ would have called him clean, Satan would not have had such access to him, and he would have not done what he did. His betrayal of Christ did not cause him to lose his salvation – it was the ultimate act of the nature of his heart – rebellion to God, dominated by selfish greed.

How important that we make sure we are truly His. There needs to have been a one-time event where we placed our whole-hearted trust in Christ. But then there needs to be fruit – the fruit of righteousness, to confirm that that original profession of faith was genuine.

What a tragedy, to be numbered with the many of Matthew 7 who will hear with shock that they did things in Christ’s name, but He never knew them. It will not be the case that Jesus once knew them, and then left them, but that He never knew them. Let us make sure by examining the fruit of our life – to see that we are one of His.