

CRESCENT HILL BAPTIST CHURCH

SERMONS

"JUDAS: THE BIG DISAPPOINTMENT"

Sunday Morning, March 26, 1961 - Revival Service
Crescent Hill Baptist Church
Louisville, Kentucky
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The name "Judas" is a widely known symbol. People who know nothing else about the Bible instantly associate this name with the act of betrayal. What the name Quisling came to mean in the Second World War, the name Judas has meant for nineteen centuries. As a result, no mother ever names her new-born son Judas; Dante exiled this one to the deepest levels of Hades; and the name is always regarded with a sense of contempt, because here was a man who for thirty pieces of silver betrayed his best friend. But what is the story back of Judas' life? Who was this man and what caused him to do that dastardly deed? I think that there is truth for us in the life of this man. We must recognize that you can enter the castle of truth in more than one way; there are errors to be avoided as well as positive principles to be followed. We can come in the back door as well as the front; we can look at failure, and in seeing this, avoid it in our own lives and be helped. Therefore this morning, though it is admittedly negative, I want to call to the center of your attention "the great disappointment", Judas Iscariot, and I want us to look at his life with the sole purpose of trying to learn from him that which will be helpful for our own spiritual pilgrimage.

I feel that we can best get at the truth in Judas' life if we seek the answers to three questions. The first question is this: Why did Jesus settle on this one and include him in this intimate fellowship - this one who was destined to be such a tragic failure? I think the answer to that question is quite obvious. Jesus selected Judas for the very same reason that He selected the other eleven - because Judas could have been a great disciple. We must forever put out of our minds that Judas was predestined to be the Son of Perdition. We must get rid of the notion that this one was acting out an inevitable plot. Judas could have been as great an apostle as any of the twelve that Jesus called to Him. Because of his ignominious deed, we are sometimes blinded to the fact that the New Testament implies that he was a very worthwhile person. There were many qualities in this man that could have been developed and produced a mighty servant of the Kingdom of God. The very fact that Jesus picked him in the first place says a great deal about him. The fact that he was chosen to be the treasurer of the group indicates that at least at one point he was held in high esteem by his contemporaries. When Jesus sent out the twelve on their first mission, there is no indication that Judas was any less effective than the others. This sounds strange, but it means that at one time Judas Iscariot actually proclaimed the gospel of God and in the name of Jesus Christ called demons out of demon-possessed people. And then on the night of the Last Supper, when Jesus startled the group by saying, "Right here in this room, there is one that is going to betray me," there is no indication that there was suspicion of Judas any more than all the rest. In fact, after he had gotten up and left, they still did not know it was Judas, or surely

they would have stopped him. Therefore, add up all of these qualities and it comes to the sum that Judas was potentially a capable servant of God. Here is a man who could have been a great disciple, who could have been a powerful weapon in the hands of Christ.

The fact that he did not become this is but a foreboding reminder that human beings are free, that we have within ourselves the power of self-determination, that we do have a creative part in that which we become. We hear a great deal today about the importance of external factors as far as our own motivation is concerned. We hear about these deep forces in our subconscious that affect us in ways of which we are not even aware. Our psychologists are always telling us this. The sociologist says that what is going on about a person - his environment - is very important to what he becomes. The geneticist is always telling us that heredity is a powerful force in making us into what we are. In fact, I heard the other day about a little boy who came home from school. He had a report card that was filled with "F's". When he handed it to his parents, they were horrified, but he seized the initiative. He said, "Well, what shall we blame it on - environment or heredity?" This young man may not have learned much at school, but he was skilled in the age-old art of evading his own responsibility and retreating behind something external. The truth of the matter is that the story of every man's life can be diagrammed in the form of a triangle; one of the parts is what a man is; another part is what happens to him; and the third part is his response to both of these. Take away any one of the three sides and you have an incomplete picture. We hate to admit it; we draw back from it in fear of its august responsibility; but the truth is that every one of us, in the decisions that we make, have a creative influence on that which we become. And this man who lived with Jesus for three and a half years, who had the pleasure of His company and the stimulation of the fellowship of the disciples, still had within himself the power of personal choice. In this case he took the wrong turn and wound up in the wrong place. Therefore, the question: "Why did Jesus pick Judas?" is answered, "Because he could have been a great disciple." Why did he fail? Because his own response was negative. Need I remind you that if it could happen to Judas, it could happen to you?

The second question moves on into the story: Why did Judas betray Jesus? Why would he ever enter that dastardly collusion with the forces of evil who were anxious to take Jesus forcibly and send Him to a cross? Why would he "sell out" his best friend, with whom he had had the most intimate association, and thus place his signature to the death warrant of our Lord? Well, this question has intrigued men for nineteen centuries. There have been any number of speculations, trying to dispel the mystery of why Judas betrayed his Lord. One answer seems obvious; he did it because of materialistic greed; he wanted those thirty pieces of silver. Now, I know that some people will do anything for money; and yet I somehow cannot feel that this is an adequate explanation of why Judas did this. If Judas had been this kind of extremely mercenary person, I doubt he would have stayed with this little itinerant group as long as he had. If money had been his only consideration, he could have gotten far more than thirty pieces of silver for the life of this One that the Pharisees hated. I cannot believe that this is the true motive.

Other people have said that Judas was moved by a sense of panic. He saw that the authorities were moving in and he suddenly realized that he himself might be implicated. He saw in the expression on those faces that they were sure to get Him, and so "to save his own skin", at the last moment he switched sides that he himself might not go down. Here again, although I know the power of self-preservation, I cannot feel that this is the real reason. For if his only consideration had been getting himself uninvolved, Judas could, as so many others had done, simply turned away and disappeared into the darkness. Men long before Judas had looked at Jesus and decided that the cost was too great and turned back to their meager chores, and if his only thought had been escape, Judas could have done the same.

Why did he do it? I have my own personal reason. I believe that the reason Judas betrayed Jesus was because he wanted to force Him in a corner, make Him call down legions of angels, and become a political and a military Messiah. There is good reason for believing that Judas was a member of the Zealot party. This was a group of fierce nationalists who flourished in the province of Judea and who wanted above all else to drive the hated Romans into the sea and make Israel a political power. They dreamed that someday a Messiah would come from God and with His divine powers would organize an army and lead an insurrection against Rome. Now Judas was the only Judean in the group, and it could be that he saw in Jesus the possibility of his kind of Messiah. So he attached himself to Jesus, hoping all along that the moment would come when the spark would be struck and he would be "on the inside" to lead the army against Rome. Yet the longer he listened to Jesus the more disillusioned he became. Jesus was not interested in hating Rome; He was interested in loving men. Jesus never talked about the sword; He talked about suffering. Jesus did not seem concerned with a kingdom of this world; He was always talking about the Kingdom of God that was above time and space. Judas may have become increasingly frustrated; "Why doesn't He get on with the real task? Why doesn't He organize an army, use some of this power to attract people?" Finally he must have said to himself, "I'm going to force a show-down. I'm going to 'sell Him out' so that the enemy will come; surely then, when He is in a corner, He will call down the legions and the rebellion will get under way." Therefore, hoping that he could bring about that which was the dream of his life, for thirty pieces of silver he set the deadly machinery in motion.

What was really happening? It was the age-old collision between self-will and God's will. Here was a man who had set a dream for himself, and when he encountered the will of God which was bigger and better and higher, he could not let go of his meager dream and give himself to this larger truth. It was Judas' way and Judas' way alone. He had to have his material kingdom; he had to have his political Messiah. Therefore, in all of those three and a half years, he never "accepted" Jesus for what He was; he was always trying to make Him into what he wanted Him to be. Within the heart of Judas there was a violent collision between what he wanted and what God wanted. And in this particular situation Judas is a symbol of every one of us. For when you get right down to it, humanity's basic sickness is that we want our own way and we do not care about God's. We want God to be on our side so that He can accomplish our purposes. We dream our dreams, we set our patterns, and then we say, "God, ratify these and make them possible." Much of our religion is nothing but veiled self-interest, and in our "heart of hearts" we are just like Judas - we want our own way and are not willing to let go of our meager dream that the larger dream of God can come true. I see

it happening all the time. Here is a man who has been active in a church for years. One day his only son is killed in an automobile accident. He is so enraged that he lifts his fist to heaven and says, "I will never again believe there is a God because He has taken away my only son." In other words, there is no place in this man's heart for any purpose but his own. "I have my own life, if God disturbs it, I'll have nothing to do with Him." Here is a young woman who enters a speech contest, prays that she will win, and then loses. So she turns her back on God and says, "You let me down in my hour of need. You did not let me have my wish." To many, God is simply a tool and if He does not make possible our own little dreams we want no part of Him. This was Judas. He had a dream; he had a way; he had a will - and this was more important to him than anything else in the world. One night, in the darkness of his own soul, the will of God so clearly seen in Jesus - met the will of Judas, and the will of Judas prevailed.

You know, this collision of wills in Judas is a marked contrast to another collision of wills that happened the same night. This one took place in a garden called Gethsemane. It took place within the soul of Jesus Himself. There He is praying, "Father, let this cup pass from me." In other words, what Jesus wanted and what God wanted were two different things. Here again were two dreams clashing head-on, but out of that conflict comes that magnificent resolution, "But not my will, but Thine be done." And friends, if somewhere in your life there has not been that same kind of resolution as was in the heart of Christ, you are walking the same path of disaster as our infamous friend, Judas Iscariot. Oh, you may come to church every time the door is opened; you may give great sums of money to every charitable organization; you may be the most loyal institutionalist that we have; but if, in your heart of hearts, what you want is more important than what God wants, if your dreams are taking pre-eminence over the dreams of God, then you are in the same failing pattern as was this disciple who failed himself. Why did Judas betray Jesus? Because his own dreams were more important than the dream of God. And need I remind you, if it could happen to Judas, it could happen to you.

The third question takes us to the end of the story. Why did Judas commit suicide? We are told that when Judas realized the movement of events, he tried frantically to give back the money and absolve himself. When he could not, he threw down the coins and went out and hanged himself. Why did he finally resolve in his despair to take a rope and plunge headlong into the abyss of nothingness? I think I know the answer: he committed suicide because he did not know what to do with his guilt. He had a sin of which he suddenly became conscious, and he did not know where to go or what to do with it. He realized that he had sinned and betrayed innocent blood. Things had not gone as Judas had hoped they would go. Instead of starting an insurrection, Jesus had simply surrendered to His antagonists and gone with them. And suddenly Judas realized who Jesus was and what He was trying to do; he realized that he had been tragically mistaken, that he had written Jesus' death warrant; and the load of sin - the thought that at that moment Jesus was being sent to His grave - was more than Judas could stand. He did not know what to do with his burden of sin; and crushed under its weight, he took a rope and ended it all.

The tragedy is that things could have been different - if he had just done as the other eleven, had come to Jesus and asked for forgiveness. When you stop to think about it, this was the ultimate undoing of Judas Iscariot. It was not what he did. It was what he failed to do. For you see, what Judas did, bad as

it was, was really not much worse than what Peter did when he denied Jesus, or what the other ten did when they fled into the night and deserted Jesus in His hour of need. What Judas did is of the same quality as the deeds of all the others. The difference was that these eleven came to Jesus and had the load lifted; Judas took his own sin and went out into eternity -- headlong. I do not know how you feel, but I am fully confident that if, after he had thrown down those pieces of silver, instead of going and hanging himself into the abyss of nothingness, Judas had followed the crowd out to the place called Golgotha, and had moved up to that cross that was in the center and lifted his voice to the Form that was hanging there, and had somehow mustered up the courage to say, "Jesus, Jesus, this is Judas, the one who betrayed You. Jesus, I had to come here to tell you that I am sorry. I had to come to tell you that I've made a terrible mistake, that I just now realized who You are and what You are trying to do. Jesus, I know that I have done a terrible thing but Jesus, could You -- could You possibly forgive me?" If this had happened, I have absolute assurance that the Christ who had prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do", would have looked down from that cross and said, "Judas, of course I forgive you. Judas, go and be My witness." If this had happened, Judas would have been the greatest apostle in the First Century Church, because "he that is forgiven much, loveth much." But he did not come to Jesus and ask for forgiveness. This was his ultimate undoing; not what he did, but what he failed to do, led to the abyss of despair.

And in all the world this morning there are just two kinds of people -- people like Simon Peter -- and people like Judas. Looked at in terms of what they have done, they are all the same, for "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." But there is a difference: Those like Simon Peter have come to the cross and asked for forgiveness; those like Judas carry in their own souls the burden of their unresolved guilt. And do you know what? If there are just two kinds of people in all the world, it means that in this auditorium this morning there are just two kinds also. And it means that every one of us here is standing behind either Simon Peter or Judas. Looked at in terms of what we have done we are all exactly the same. The difference is that some of us have come to Jesus and found forgiveness; the others still in themselves have the burden of their guilt. Look at Simon Peter, look at Judas, and then let me ask you a question: With which man do you stand?