
Something else happened on the night before the Lord’s death besides the washing of the disciples’ feet and the institution of the Supper. It helped make the evening forever memorable. On the same night, during the evening meal, Jesus exposed and expelled the false disciple who had planned to deliver his Master into the hands of those who wanted Him dead. He had already alluded to the fact that there was a traitor among the Twelve. He did this while He was washing their feet. He had hinted that they were not all clean and insinuated that there was one of them who knew but would not do. After He finished and explained why He had served them with humble love, He proceeded to the dreaded task of exposing the disciple He had alluded to. His spirit was troubled at the thought of the painful task. As He shuddered in the presence of such satanic wickedness, He introduced the subject by making this general announcement: “Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me” (Mt. 26:21). Afterwards, as He answered their questions, Jesus mentioned the particular individual and explained that the traitor was the one to whom He would give the dipped morsel.

This announcement was new to the disciples, but it was not new to their Master. Jesus had known all along that there was a traitor in the camp. He had even hinted at it as much as a full year earlier. Except for that one occasion, He had not talked about the subject. He had patiently carried the secret burden in His own heart. Now, however, the secret could not be hidden any longer. The hour had come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Judas had made up his mind to be the instrument for betraying his Lord to death. Such awful work, once the decision has been made to carry it out, should, by all means, be done without delay. Then Jesus wanted to be rid of the false disciple’s company. He wanted to spend the last few hours of His life in loving, confidential fellowship with His faithful ones, free from the irritation and distraction that was caused by the presence of an undeclared, but deadly, enemy. Therefore, He does not wait until Judas is ready to leave. He invites him to leave and asserts His authority over him even after he has renounced his allegiance and given himself over to the devil’s service. Reaching for the morsel, Jesus, in essence, says to him: “I know you, Judas. You are the man. You have resolved to betray Me. Leave, then, and do it.” Then He explicitly says: “What you do, do quickly” (Jn. 13:27). It was an order to leave - immediately.
Judas took the hint. “He went out immediately” (Jn. 13:30). So, he finally quit the company of which he had been an unworthy member. One has to wonder how such a man ever got in. How was he ever admitted into such a holy fellowship? How did it happen that he was chosen to be one of the Twelve? Didn’t Jesus know the real character of this man when He chose Him? The words our Lord spoke just before this event do not allow us to question this. “I know the ones I have chosen,” He said, while expounding on the washing of their feet (John 13:18). Evidently, He was claiming that He knew all of them, including Judas, at the time He chose them. Then, did He choose Judas, knowing what he was, in order that He might have among the Twelve one by whom He could be betrayed, so the Scriptures could be fulfilled? It certainly seems that He was hinting at it in the declaration to which He has just alluded. Jesus goes on to say: “But it is that the Scripture may be fulfilled, ‘He who eats My bread has lifted up his heel against Me’” (Jn. 13:18). It is not conceivable that Iscariot was chosen simply to be a traitor like an actor might be chosen by a theater manager to play the part of Iago. The purpose mentioned in the Scripture just quoted might ultimately be served by his being chosen. But that purpose was not the motive behind the choice. These two points are certain: (1) On the one hand, Judas did not become a follower of Jesus with treacherous intentions; and (2) Jesus did not chose Judas to be one of the Twelve because He foreknew that he would eventually become a traitor.

**Why Did Jesus Choose Judas?**

If the choice of the false disciple was not due to ignorance or foreknowledge, then how can it be explained? The only explanation that can be given is that, apart from some secret insight, Judas was eligible for the position as far as outward appearance was concerned. He could not be overlooked on the basis of what others saw on the surface. He must have had qualities that would have made others speak about him like Samuel did about Eliab: “Surely the Lord’s anointed stands here before the Lord” (I Sam. 16:6). Only someone possessing the eye of omniscience could have detected him. So, Jesus’ choice of him is perfectly intelligible. The Head of the church simply did what the church has to do in similar situations. The church chooses men to fill sacred offices on the basis of qualifications that have been observed in their lives, such as knowledge, zeal, apparent godliness, and behavior. Yet sometimes she makes wrong decisions and confers dignity on people like Judas who dishonor the positions they fill. The resulting consequences are great. But Christ has taught us, by His example in choosing Judas (and also by the Parable of the Tares), that we must submit to the evil and leave the remedy in higher hands. Out of evil God ultimately brings good, as He did in the case of the traitor.

We suppose Judas was chosen to the apostleship on the basis that he was apparently qualified. So what kind of man would that be? An offensive, conscious hypocrite, seeking some personal benefit, while verbally shooting for something higher? Not necessarily; not probably. Rather, it would have been someone like Jesus described Judas to be when He made the comment: “If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them” (Jn. 13:17). The false disciple was a
sentimental, believable, self-deceived pietist who knew what was good and approved of it. But he did not consciously practice it. He leaned toward those things which were noble and holy in his feelings, imaginations, and intellect. However, in his will and conduct, he was the slave of worthless, selfish passions. He would always put himself first, yet he could zealously devote himself to doing good deeds when his personal interests were not compromised. This is what the Apostle James called “a double-minded man” (Jas. 1:8). In describing Judas in this way, we are not drawing the picture of a single monster. People like Judas are by no means as rare as some might think. Sacred and secular history offer numerous examples of them. They play an important role in human affairs. Balaam, who had the vision of a prophet and the soul of a miser, was this kind of a man. Robespierre, the evil genius of the French Revolution, was another. This man who sent thousands to the guillotine had, in his earlier days, resigned his office as a provincial judge because it was against his conscience to pronounce the death sentence on a criminal who was found guilty of a capital offence. A third example, and one more remarkable than the other two, may be found in the famous Greek Alcibiades (c. 450-404 B.C.). He became close friends with the greatest and best of the Greeks. But he had unlimited ambition, was unscrupulous and licentious. This man betrayed his native city and joined the side of her enemies. However, in his youth, he had been an enthusiastic admirer and disciple of Socrates. We know how he felt toward the Athenian sage because of the words that were put into his mouth by Plato in one of his dialogues. These words involuntarily suggest a parallel between the speaker and the unworthy follower of Someone greater than Socrates: “I experience toward this man alone (Socrates) what no one would believe me capable of, a sense of shame. For I am conscious of an inability to contradict him and decline to do what bids me; and when I go away I feel myself overcome by the desire of popular esteem. Therefore, I flee from him and avoid him. But when I see him, I am ashamed of my admissions and, often times, I would be glad if he ceased to exist among the living; and yet I know well, that were that to happen, I should be still more grieved” (Plato’s Symposium).

Since the character of Judas is as we have described, we can almost comprehend the possibility of his turning a traitor. Anyone who loves himself more than any other person, no matter how good, or any cause, no matter how holy, is always capable of bad faith. He is a traitor in the heart from the beginning. All that is needed is a series of circumstances intended to bring out the evil aspects of his nature. Therefore, the question arises, “What were the circumstances that converted Judas from a possible into an actual traitor?”

Why Did Judas Turn Traitor?
This is a question that is very hard to answer. The crime committed by Iscariot continues to remain mysterious and unexplainable, even though there has been so much discussion about it. By it, he earned for himself a terrible reputation. Many attempts have been made to assign probable motives for the vile deed. Some tend to excuse Judas, while others multiply his guilt. All
attempts have been, more or less, conjectural. None are perfectly satisfactory. As for the Gospel narratives, they do not explain Judas’ wickedness; they only record it. The synoptical evangelists (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) do mention that the traitor made a bargain with the priests and received from them a sum of money for the service he rendered. And John, in his narrative of the anointing at Bethany, states that the fault-finding disciple was a thief, using money from the common treasury for himself (Jn. 12:6). These facts, of course, show him to have been a covetous man. No one but a greedy person with a covetous spirit could have taken that money for himself. A vindictive person whose pride has been wounded, or who imagined himself in some way to be wronged, might play the role of a traitor for the love of revenge. But he would not want to be paid for his work. The minor pilfering from the bag was also a sure sign that he was a disgraceful, corrupt soul. Perhaps the very fact that he kept the money bag for the company of Jesus can be regarded as an indication that his heart was greedy. We can only imagine that he got the bag to carry because the other disciples were all extremely careless about money matters, while he had natural inclinations toward finance and demonstrated a desire to be in charge of the funds. The others would be very glad to find a brother willing to take the trouble. And since they had absorbed the spirit of their Master’s precept, “Do not be anxious for tomorrow” (Mt. 6:34), they would not think of running for the office against him.

The Gospel writers definitely represent Judas as a covetous man. But they do not present his covetousness as the only, or even as the main, motive behind his crime. It can hardly have been the only one. In the first place, would it not have been better for him to have continued as the treasurer, with ready access to the funds, than to sell his Master for the small sum of thirty pieces of silver (Mt. 27:3). Also, what could motivate a man, whose primary and overruling passion was to amass money, to become a disciple of Jesus at all? Surely following One who had no place to lay His head was not a likely way to make money! Finally, how do we account for Judas’ repentance if the hypothesis is true that his sole objective was to gain a few pieces of silver? It was so intense, though extremely unholy in its nature. Greed can make a man, possessing wonderful talents, thoroughly mercenary and unscrupulous. This was true in the case of the famous Duke of Marlborough. But it is extremely rare for a man who is filled with greed to feel any remorse over the crimes he committed because of greed. It is the nature of greed to destroy the conscience and to make all things, no matter how sacred, corrupt. Then where did that mighty volcanic upheaval in the heart of Judas come from? Surely more passions, other than the cold and hardening love of profit, were at work in his soul when he sold his Lord!

Wrestling with this difficulty, some have suggested that, in betraying Jesus, Judas was motivated by feelings of jealousy or spite which arose from arguments with the other disciples or imagined injuries. This suggestion, in and of itself, is not improbable. Offenses could have very easily come from various sources. The simple fact that Judas was not a Galilean, but a native of another province, might cause a misunderstanding. Human likes and dislikes ride on very little things.
Family relationships, common names, or common birthplaces have far more power than the great bonds which connect us with all of the human race. In religion, the same idea holds true. The ties to a common Lord, a common hope, and a common spiritual life are weak when compared to the bonds created by being a part of a common sect and similar religious customs and opinions. So who knows what offenses arose from those arguments among the disciples about who would be the greatest in the kingdom. What if the man of Kerioth had been made to feel that, no matter who was going to be the greatest, he had no chance because he was not a Galilean? The miserly, covetous habits of Judas as treasurer would be a third cause for bad feelings in the apostolic company. Let’s suppose that his dishonesty escaped notice. Even so, his tendency to have more interest in the money itself than in the objects for which the money was planned and to reluctantly give the money to the Apostles or to the poor would surely be noticed. In such an outspoken group of men, they would not only notice - they would not be able to keep quiet about it.

These comments show how bad feelings could have started between Judas and his fellow-disciples. But what we still have to understand is the hatred that the false disciple had for his Master. Had Jesus done anything to offend the man by whom He was betrayed? Yes! He had seen through him. That was offense enough! Of course Judas knew that he was seen through. People cannot live together in close fellowship for very long without knowing what the others think about them. If I do not trust a brother, he will find out about it even if I attempt to conceal it. But the guileless and faithful One would not make any attempt to hide it. It is true, He would not bring the matter of His distrust of Judas to his attention; neither would He carefully try to hide it just so things would go smoothly between them. Jesus, who so faithfully corrected the faults of the other disciples, would also fulfill His duty to this one. He would make him aware that He disapproved of his spirit and evil habits in order to bring him to repentance. It is not difficult to imagine what the effect of His dealing with him would be. With Peter, correction had a very positive effect. It immediately brought him to the right perspective. In the case of Judas, the result would be very different. If he were conscious of the fact that Jesus did not think well of him, or if Jesus openly rebuked him, it would breed an obstinate resentment in his heart. There would also be an ever-deepening alienation from Christ. Finally, love turned to hatred, and the unrepentant disciple began to harbor vindictive feelings.

The way in which Judas carried out the betrayal supports the idea that he was motivated by malicious, revengeful feelings. He was not content to give the proper information to the Jewish authorities so they could seize their Victim. Judas led the band of men that was sent to apprehend his Master and even pointed Him out to them by an affectionate greeting. For someone in a vindictive mood, that kiss might be sweet. But to a man in any other mood, even though he were a traitor, how abhorrent and abominable! The salutation was entirely unnecessary. It was not necessary for the plot to be successful. The military detachment was furnished with torches,
and Judas could have pointed Jesus out to them while he stayed in the background. But that way
would not satisfy a close friend who turned to become a mortal enemy.

Along with malice and greed, the instinct of self-preservation may have also had a place among
the motives of Judas. His violation of trust could have been caused by his selfish caution. The
traitor was a shrewd man and believed that catastrophe was near. He understood the state of af-
fairs better than his single-minded brothers. For the children of this world are wiser in their gen-
eration than the children of light. The other disciples, so enthusiastic and hopeful, were blinded
to the signs of the times. But the false disciple, because he was less noble, was more discerning.
Disaster was imminent. What was to be done? Why, turn things around and set himself up. Make
Christ’s loss his gain. If this corruptness could be carried out under the pretense that Jesus
provoked him, then that is even better!

These observations help bring the crime of Judas Iscariot within the range of human experience.
Therefore, it was worth our while to present them. For it is not in our best interest to think of the
traitor as an absolutely unique character, as the solitary, perfect incarnation of satanic wicked-
ness. It would be better for us to think of his crime in a way that our minds make us ask, like the
disciples, “Is it I?” “Who can discern his errors?....Keep your servant also from willful sins” (Ps.
19:12a,13a). There have been many traitors besides Judas who, because of malice or for profit,
have deceived noble men and noble causes. Some of them perhaps were even worse than he.
It was his unenviable distinction to betray the Most Exalted of all victims. But many who have
been guilty of sin have not let it affect them as much as he did. They have been able to live hap-
pily after their crime.

So it is important for us to be warned that Judas is not an isolated sinner. But it is also significant
that we think about his crime as an incomprehensible mystery of iniquity. John would want us
to look at it in this light. He could have told us a lot about the relationship between Jesus and
Judas in order to explain Judas’ act. But he has not chosen to do that. The only explanation that
he gives for the traitor’s crime is that Satan had taken possession of him. He mentions this two
times in one chapter, as if to express his own horror and to awaken similar horror in his readers
(John 13:2,27). And to deepen the impression, after he tells about Judas’ leaving, he adds the
interesting note that it took place at night: “And so after receiving the morsel he went out im-
nediately; and it was night” (John 13:30). An appropriate time for such a deed!

Judas betrayed his Lord to death. Then he went away and took his own life. What a tragic accom-
paniment to the crucifixion was that suicide! What a powerful illustration of the evil produced
by a double mind! In order for Judas to have been happy to some degree, he should have either
been a better man or a worse one. If he had been better, he would have been saved from commit-
ing his crime. If he had been worse, he would have postponed his torment. As it turned out, he
was bad enough to do his infamous deed and good enough to be unable to bear the burden of its
guilt. Woe to such a man! Better for him, indeed, that he had never been born!

What a sad ending Judas had when compared with his favorable beginning! Here was a man
who was chosen to be a companion of the Son of Man, an eyewitness of His work, and who at
one time had engaged in preaching the gospel and casting out demons. Now he was possessed
by the devil himself and was driven by him to do damnable deeds. Finally, he was employed by
a righteous Providence to take revenge and commit a crime. In light of this history, how shallow
the theory that tries to resolve all moral differences between people by blaming their circum-
stances! Who ever lived in better circumstances where he could have become good than Judas?
Yet the very influences which ought to have fostered goodness only brought out the latent evil
within him.

What a bitter cross the pure, loving heart of Jesus had to bear by being in the constant presence
of such a man as Judas! Yet how patiently He bore it for years! In doing so, He is an example and
a comfort to His true followers. For this purpose, among others, He had this cross to bear. The
Redeemer of His people had a companion who lifted up his heel against Him, in order that He
might identify with His children and be able to deliver them from their distresses - in this and
in all other respects. Does any faithful servant of Christ have any reason to complain that his
love has been repaid with hatred, his truth with bad faith? Has anyone ever felt obligated to treat
another person like a real Christian when he suspects he is a hypocrite? It is a hard trial, but let
him look unto Jesus and be patient!