

### **Scripture: Matthew 26:14-16, 44-50**

When one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests **15** and said, “What will you give me if I betray him to you?” They paid him thirty pieces of silver. **16** And from that moment he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.

**44** So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. **45** Then he came to the disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Now the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. **46** Get up, let us be going. Look, my betrayer is at hand.”

**47** While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. **48** Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, “The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him.” **49** At once he came up to Jesus and said, “Greetings, Rabbi!” and kissed him. **50** Jesus said to him, “Friend, do what you are here to do.” Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and arrested him.

### **Sermon: Perspectives of the Cross: The Guilty One**

Oh, Judas. The bad guy. The man we love to hate. The person who in this very gospel was told by Jesus, “It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.” Judas was a man who didn’t get to experience Jesus’s resurrection, who didn’t get to be revered by the descendants of Jesus’ disciples. Judas is the human villain.

Judas Iscariot is first named in the gospel of Mathew when Jesus called the twelve disciples. Yet in that announcement as a disciple, he was already labeled as the one who betrayed Jesus. In other gospels, he is described as a “devil” and a “traitor”.

Judas is the epitome of greed as Matthew portrayed him. Just after a story of an unidentified woman’s very expensive gift to Jesus, we read that Judas went to the chief priests asking for money in exchange for the person he had dropped his life for 3 years before. It seemed as if all of Jesus’s teachings, all the miracles, all of the community didn’t amount to enough for Judas.

It was as if his three-year discipleship was nothing to him. Judas went to the chief priests to bargain.

Now, the amount of this deal had a meaning. It wasn't just 30 pieces of silver, bargained by two random parties. This designation of money was the price paid for the death benefit of a slave in ancient Hebrew society, as illustrated as early as the book of Exodus in the Old Testament. What eerie significance could that connection have for Judas' motives, Judas' actions?

Had the chief priests really thought of Jesus as a lesser being, and not even a criminal with a heavy bounty? Had Judas disregarded Jesus's life and ministry so much that he was willing to equate him with just a random workhand? 30 pieces of silver were exchanged. Jesus's fate had been sealed, and so had Judas's.

But, let's take a moment to look into the final interaction between Jesus and Judas. Judas begins with "hello". This same word in ancient Greek was used when the soldiers mockingly saluted Jesus as he hung on the cross. But that's not all! Judas, then, addressed Jesus as "Rabbi" not "Lord". "Lord" was the name the other disciples had used to refer to Jesus. By calling Jesus "Rabbi", Judas had diminished his relationship to Jesus to that of the relationship that Jesus had with the Pharisees. In other words, an unbeliever, a critic. Jesus, then, responded as an indifferent communicator, using a Greek word that was a generic way of addressing a stranger. The guards arrested Jesus. The deal had been carried out.

Now, in many instances, the betrayal is the last the general population hears about Judas. But it is definitely not for the gospel of Matthew. Instead, we are invited to see the repercussions of Judas' actions. In Matthew 27, we read that Judas repented and brought back the money to the chief priests and elders. In our minds, he may have done everything right...he apologized, returned the money, and acknowledged that Jesus was innocent and admitted his own guilt. But, after their indifferent response to him, he was struck with an unrecoverable grief. Judas' death is documented.

There aren't many stories in the gospels of people actually dying.

Besides the big act of redemption through Jesus, we only hear of a few deaths, and all but Judas's end with Jesus's miracles. This recollection of Judas's demise points us to the need to always have the right allegiances. In the 21st century, musical artists through a wide variety of genres have used Judas's story as an illustration of broken trust and betrayal. From rock to pop, from reggae to Broadway, Judas is known for his one mistake. In his case, the human condition of brokenness in an imperfect world won. Through Judas's betrayal and guilt, we are reminded of a hope that only God can give.

But there is a deeper theological implication to this story. Within the story of Judas, some people, like myself, may have a wonderment. If God had a plan all along that Jesus would come to earth, would teach the people, would die and rise again, wasn't Judas destined to be the bad guy? In a way, was Judas called to betray Jesus? After all, our scripture says right before Judas and the guards appear, "Now the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners." So, friends, can we really condemn someone for being a part of God's plan? Wasn't Judas being who he was called to be? Was he called to be the scapegoat for a miraculous thing to occur?

The answers to these questions all depend on what your view of soteriology, or in other words, what your belief about God's salvation is. Did Jesus need to die to bring humanity back into a right relationship with God? Did Jesus's betrayer need to be one of his disciples for God's plan to work? Did Judas have to be psychologically and emotionally punished by his actions?

You can choose whether you take the idea of Judas's calling into consideration of who he was. Either way, Judas has pointed modern people to our humanity. He points us to brokenness, greed, betrayal, and guilt. So, what do we do with it?

We can't just compare ourselves with Judas and leave it. Where is God's grace in that? We can't just ignore this story because it is destiny-changing. Here's what we can do.

We can see the struggle within ourselves. We can see the struggle within others and react. But not react in disgust or indifference, not in hurt or in pain, but react in grace. We don't really know what happened to Judas after his death, and we don't know the guilt that people around us carry. What we do know is how we have carried our guilt. So, in these last few minutes, let's ponder and write about our questions this week.

What is the heaviest burden of guilt I am carrying around right now?

What would it take for me to let go of that guilt?

How can I use my faith to give that burden to God?

Let us pray: O God who searches every heart, You know the weight of our betrayals. You know the moments we deny You with our silence, and the moments we sell pieces of our integrity for comfort, approval, or fear. We remember Judas Iscariot — how regret overtook him like a storm, how guilt whispered that there was no way back. We confess that we, too, have stood in that shadowed place, believing our worst act was our final word.

From the depths we cry to You, O Lord. If You kept account of sins, who could stand? But with You there is forgiveness — not thin mercy, not reluctant pardon — but mercy strong enough to hold even us. Where shame tells us to run, You call us to return. Where guilt tells us the story is over, You speak resurrection. You do not bind us forever to what we have done. In Jesus, You open a future we did not deserve.

So today we lay down what Judas could not release. We loosen our grip on self-condemnation. We refuse to make our sin bigger than Your grace. Teach us to trust mercy more than our memories. In your son's name, we pray. Amen.