

From Betrayal to Remorse

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

1st in a three-part series

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Mark 14:1–21 (NIV)

Now the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were scheming to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him. ²“But not during the festival,” they said, “or the people may riot.”

³While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head.

⁴Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, “Why this waste of perfume? ⁵It could have been sold for more than a year’s wages and the money given to the poor.” And they rebuked her harshly.

⁶“Leave her alone,” said Jesus. “Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. ⁷The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. ⁸She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. ⁹Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”

¹⁰Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them.

¹¹They were delighted to hear this and promised to give him money. So he watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

¹²On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb, Jesus’ disciples asked him, “Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?”

¹³So he sent two of his disciples, telling them, “Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. ¹⁴Say to the owner of the house he enters, ‘The Teacher asks: Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ ¹⁵He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there.”

¹⁶The disciples left, went into the city and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover.

¹⁷When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve. ¹⁸While they were reclining at the table eating, he said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me—one who is eating with me.”

¹⁹They were saddened, and one by one they said to him, “Surely you don’t mean me?”

²⁰“It is one of the Twelve,” he replied, “one who dips bread into the bowl with me. ²¹The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.”

Mark 14:43–47 (NIV)

⁴³Just as he was speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders.

⁴⁴Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: “The one I kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard.” ⁴⁵Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, “Rabbi!” and kissed him.

⁴⁶The men seized Jesus and arrested him. ⁴⁷Then one of those standing near drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.

Matthew 27:1–5 (NIV)

Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people made their plans how to have Jesus executed. ²So they bound him, led him away and handed him over to Pilate the governor.

³When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. ⁴“I have sinned,” he said, “for I have betrayed innocent blood.”

“What is that to us?” they replied. “That’s your responsibility.”

⁵So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself.

Disciple to Traitor – one man chose the darkest path of all.

I don’t recall ever meeting a man who called himself “Judas.” Judah, Jude . . . yes. But not Judas. It is a shame in a way. It once was a good and strong name, the Greek form

of the name “Judah,” the largest of the tribes of Israel. Two of Jesus’ disciples are named Judas (in English translations). But now, it is a name set aside and rarely used. It has been that way for 2,000 years.¹ “Judas” came to mean “Betrayer.”

As we continue our journey through the gospel of Mark, you’ve probably gathered that we have been using the analogy of media and newspapers to tell this story. We began with social media, and then moved on to tabloids (all those miracle stories). This week we begin a section we’re calling “comics.” The best comics, at least the ones I most enjoy, are those that tell us something about ourselves, poking fun at our faults and foibles, our silliness and downright stupidity. The Far Side was one of the best at this, exaggerating in order to reveal. (Arthur mentioned to me that this Far Side was one of his favorites . . . you can find anything on the web.)



The truth is that Judas has become a caricature. We tend to see him one-dimensionally, as if his betrayal of Jesus is all that there is to know about Judas Iscariot.

But that can’t be. Judas was part of Jesus’ inner circle, one of the twelve. And he was the treasurer of the group, the keeper of the purse. Do we have to assume that he was a bad egg all along? Or that Jesus chose him knowing that Judas would betray him?

Was he really so different from the other disciples? Yes, Judas betrayed Jesus to the authorities. But Peter would deny three times

that he even knew Jesus. Do we really have to get into which act deserves the greater condemnation? I wonder what Peter would say about it?

Here, James Edwards looks at the portrait of Judas in Mark’s gospel:

Mark closes the plot against Jesus with Judas’s agreement to betray his master (vv. 10–11). Luke 22:3 and John 13:2, 27 say that Satan caused Judas to betray Jesus, but Mark does not lay at Satan’s feet the moral failure of Jesus’ followers. Indeed, Judas’s betrayal is a prototype of the defection of the other apostles as well (14:50). According to Mark, his betrayal is more reprehensible only because it was premeditated, and more final only because he foreclosed on the possibility of forgiveness by committing suicide. That money played a part in Judas’s decision is probable, for according to the Gospel of John he was the treasurer of the Twelve, and a thief (John 12:6; 13:29). Also according to Mark, the transaction of money accompanied the plot (v. 11). The best way to detect the source of evil in practically any matter is to ask who profits from it financially, and Judas profited from the betrayal. More ideological or even idealistic motives may also have played a role. It has been suggested, for example, that Judas acted as a spy of the Sanhedrin; or that he was a closet Zealot disillusioned with Jesus’ political passivity, hoping by the plot to force Jesus’ hand to act. What truth there might be in such suggestions we cannot say, for our texts are silent about Judas’s motives.

Despite its economy, Mark’s account implies that Judas was fully responsible for his betrayal of Jesus. It is he who goes to the chief priests, not they to him; and in one of the bitterest lines in the Gospel, his treachery causes them joy (14:11). The account closes with no Hamlet-like soliloquy lamenting a tragic decision, but with Judas’s icy resolve to his complete his insidious plan: “So he watched (Gk. *zētein*) for an opportunity to hand him over.” Judas is thus not a victim of circumstances or a pawn dominated by greater forces. He is a sovereign moral

¹ A website devoted to information on names claims that there is 1.5 people named Judas for every 1 million Americans. Sounds about right to me!

agent who freely chooses evil in “handing Jesus over” (Gk. *paradidomi*). That word, the final part of the sandwich in vv. 1–11, combines the two essential truths of Jesus’ passion: the freely chosen evil of humanity, and the overarching providence of God. Divine grace uses even human evil for its saving purposes.²

As Edwards notes, we are left guessing when it comes to Judas’s motives, but isn’t that the way it is for us most of the time. I have enough trouble understanding my own motives, much less someone else’s.

In my Sunday morning class, we’ve been looking at the seven deadly sins (more precisely, the seven capital vices). One of the seven is avarice/greed. Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung subtitles her chapter on avarice: “I want it all.” Avarice is the excessive and disordered desire for money and what it can buy. Perhaps Judas had fallen into its deadly grip. Perhaps keeping the purse for Jesus and his disciples proved too much. Perhaps he justified his action on his “disappointment” with Jesus, for he was certainly not the sort of messiah Judas or anyone else expected. Perhaps he thought he was helping Jesus along – pushing him to reveal himself to all. Yes, there is no end to the justifications we can offer for anything we do – even if, in truth, it is greed that motivates us.

And at the meal that followed Judas’s visit to the priests and scribes, the last meal, Jesus told his disciples that one of them was going to betray him. Of course, Jesus doesn’t really need Judas to “help” him along. Jesus has always known that his path would take him to a direct confrontation with the earthly powers: Rome, the priests, the scribes. All would gather around Jesus like dark, ominous clouds pushing him to his death. When the woman had come to pour expensive perfume over Jesus, it was a burial anointing. Mark wants us to grasp that this anointing was done in the midst of the chief priests, the scribes . . . and Judas.

As the disciples eat their last supper with Jesus, he tells them that the betrayer will be the “one who dips into the bowl with me.” Even here, there is meaning, pointed and sharp. It was the Jewish custom that the leader would eat first and the followers after. Thus, in this simple moment, Judas is disordered and apart. He will eat “with” Jesus, not after him, unwilling to offer Jesus this small portion of respect.

Judas’s fall is complete when, in the night, he greets Jesus, “Rabbi!” and then kisses him on the cheek, cementing the identification for the arrest party. What a horrid and sad moment. A kiss? Did it have to be a kiss?

And so Jesus is arrested, taken away, questioned, and executed.

And Judas? Leon Morris considers the post-crucifixion Judas:

Judas was filled with remorse as he now realized what his conduct had led to. If he had been motivated by a desire to precipitate action that would lead to Jewish independence, he now saw that nothing of the sort was going to happen. If, as we have seen, he had simply tried to get what he could out of it all, then he now saw that the damage he had done was out of all proportion to the small gain he had made. Interestingly, the result of his remorse was a return to the Jewish leaders, bringing with him the thirty silver pieces they had paid him for the betrayal. They, of course, were religious leaders as well as politicians, and it may be that in his spiritual anguish Judas was looking for guidance and help. If so, he was to be bitterly disappointed, for these men were not particularly interested in helping people like Judas. Their minds were set on getting Jesus executed, and that was not yet accomplished.

Judas’s confession, “I sinned,” shows that he had come to appreciate

² Edwards, J. R. (2002). *The Gospel according to Mark*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary (417–418). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos.

³ DeYoung’s book is excellent. *Glittering Vices: A new look at the seven deadly sins and their remedies*. Brazos Press. 2009.

something of the enormity of the evil thing he had done. He spells it out with, “I betrayed innocent blood.” Most translations read, “I have sinned,” but Judas’s use of the aorist tense rather concentrates attention on the one great act of sin rather than on the man’s general sinfulness (Moffatt renders, “I did wrong”). The enormity of his betrayal of Jesus had come home to his conscience, and it is this that he is now confessing. But those who had paid the bribe to get Jesus into their hands were the wrong people to bring spiritual comfort to this remorseful sinner. They disclaim responsibility. “What is that to us?” they ask. It is a question to which they might well have given attention, for it was a very great deal to their discredit that they had paid money for the arrest of a man who was innocent and whom they were in the process of handing over to the Romans for execution. Their “you” is emphatic; they are saying that Judas’s conscience is a problem for him alone. People like the Jewish leaders had much more important things to bother about than that. To their eternal discredit these spiritual leaders of the people thought of Judas as a tool that had served its purpose and could be discarded, not as a man in desperate spiritual need.

So Judas hurled the money into the temple, or perhaps we should translate, “threw the coins down in the temple” (cf. NRSV). We do not know exactly where Judas was when this conversation took place; if he was in the temple, then NRSV could give the sense of it. Rieu points to a pious act with “Whereupon Judas left the money as an offering in the Temple,” but this seems very unlikely. The language seems to point to an irrational act of throwing the coins with some force into some holy place nearby, but not where Judas was at the point of his act. There is nothing to indicate an exercise in piety, only a reckless desire to repudiate his evil act. Then he went off and committed suicide by hanging. It is this, rather than the linguistics in verse 3, that makes it clear that Judas was remorseful rather than repentant. We might contrast him with Peter. That apostle had likewise sinned grievously, but he was moved by genuine repentance that led to amendment of life rather than to the further sin of suicide.⁴

As Morris notes, Judas was remorseful but not repentant. He regretted what he had done, though we can’t be sure exactly what he regrets. But his remorse does not lead to genuine change in his life, that 180° change of direction that is repentance. And what God desires from us is not mere regret for the wrongs we have done, but for us to change the direction of our lives and point them unfailingly in the direction of Jesus Christ. Judas pursued his way. We pursue our way. But we were all created to pursue the Jesus way.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. Share some of the impressions of Judas that you brought to this study. How much did you know of his story? Did anything here surprise you?
 - a. Why do you think Judas betrayed Jesus? Was it the money or was something else motivating him to his dark deed?
 - b. Jesus knew what Judas was doing. And he had plenty of opportunity to escape the arrest by heading out into the wilderness on the east side of the Mount of Olives. Why do you think Jesus stayed and allowed himself to be arrested?
2. Though Judas expresses remorse, he does not repent for his betrayal of Jesus. What do you think is the difference between the two? Which do you think is easier – to regret what you’ve done or to repent?

⁴ Morris, L. (1992). *The Gospel according to Matthew*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary (694–695). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press.

Daily Bible Readings

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

<p>Monday, Mark 11:1-11 Jesus comes to Jerusalem as the Messiah, riding a colt to shouts of “Hosanna!”</p>	<p>Tuesday, Mark 11:12-25 Jesus curses a fig tree and clear out the temple courtyards.</p>
<p>Wednesday, Mark 11:27 – 12:12 Jesus’ authority is questioned and he tells a pointed parable. Who do you think the tenants represent?</p>	<p>Thursday, Mark 12:13-44 Some more of Jesus’ pointed teaching. Try to see the confrontation mounting in this series of teaching.</p>
<p>Friday, Mark 13 Jesus reflects on the coming destruction of the temple, his own vindication, the last Days, and more.</p>	<p>Weekly Joys and Concerns</p>

Scott Engle's Weekday Bible Classes

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own.

This is very "drop-in." Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible.

On occasion Scott has to cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check www.scottengle.org to make sure the class is meeting.

Tuesday Lunchtime Class – now studying Genesis

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall on Tuesdays.

Monday Evening Class – now studying Philemon (Feb 11)

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall on Monday evenings.

But on Feb 18, 25, and March 4 this class will meet in Wesley Hall.

Scott's 11:00 Sunday Class in Festival Hall

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

Current Series: *Glittering Vices: the seven deadly sins*

Feb 17 – Gluttony: Feeding Your Face and Starving Your Heart

Feb 24 – Lust: Smoke, Fire, and Ashes

Coming in March: *How On Earth Did Jesus Become a God?*

This series will help us to get ready for the sermon series on world religions that will start after Easter.

Beginning Monday, February 18:

An all-church Bible Study in Wesley Hall taught by Scott Engle

A three-week series on Monday evenings at 7pm

What Christians Believe

There will even be "can't-miss" music to start our evening! On the 18th, the husband-and-wife duo from Nashville, *My Anchor Holds*, will begin at 6:45. You won't want to miss them!!

The series will be suitable for youth and adults.

Kim Meyers, our new minister to children and families, will provide a program for the elementary children tied to what the youth and adults will be doing in Wesley Hall.

Childcare available – make reservations at www.standrewumc.org

Sermon Notes
