

How Judas Iscariot Lost His Soul

by H. A. Ironside

"...Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place" (Acts 1:25).

The story of Judas is one of the saddest, and one of the most disappointing that has ever been recorded. Men have tried to make excuses for him.

In the last century an English essayist, Thomas De Quincey, the author of "Confessions of an English Opium Eater" wrote an essay in which he attempted to show that Peter was far more culpable than Judas because of his base and cowardly behaviour. Judas, according to De Quincey, was simply trying to give his Lord an opportunity to display himself, and assert His Messiahship.

Even so distinguished a theologian as Archbishop Whately, of the Anglican Church, took much the same position a few years ago.

That somewhat eccentric novelist, Marie Corelli, wrote the book entitled, "Barabbas," and in that book Judas is almost next to the Christ himself, the hero of the piece. He is described as a man actuated by the highest motives, a lover of his nation, a man who believed that Jesus was the promised Messiah, and only waiting an opportunity to take the throne of David, to destroy the Roman power, and to give back to the people of Israel their independence, and so, according to Corelli, he took the opportunity of betraying Jesus into the hands of His enemies in order that He might thus assert himself.

Needless to say these views are absolutely opposed to the Divine record. Here we have the very word of the living God. We do not need to theorise as to the motives that actuated Judas. The Holy Spirit Himself has told us plainly enough of what manner of spirit he was.

Many people have been troubled, because the Lord Jesus Christ ever selected Judas to be one of the twelve. There have been various conflicting theories in regard to His motive for doing so. Some have supposed that, because it was foreknown of God that Judas would be the traitor, that he would betray his Lord, the Saviour deliberately chose him, and put him in the place of apostleship in order that he might thus fulfil the Scripture in betraying Him. This would be making Divine foreknowledge a kind of fatalism, and we may be sure that our Lord Jesus Christ had no such motive. Others have gone to the other

extreme and supposed that the Lord was deceived in Judas, that He never really understood this man, that He thought him to be a better man than he was, and that, therefore, it was a great disappointment to Him when Judas turned out as he did. One may dismiss that supposition with these words, "He knew what was in man." No one ever deceived Him, and yet, knowing Judas through and through, He gave him every opportunity.

When I think of Judas, I cannot but believe that in the eyes of his brother apostles, he was a most trustworthy man up to the very last. He was the one Judean of the company. His name, Judas Iscariot, or as given elsewhere, Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, indicates the town from which he came. Iscariot simply means, "man of Kerioth." He came from that Judean village.

The other eleven disciples were from the northern province of Galilee, but Judas was the one man from the more aristocratic province of the south. Judea boasted of its orthodoxy, and its full Jewish blood, so of all the apostles, Judas was probably the one most looked up to as a man worthy to be included in the cabinet of great David's greater Son. He was chosen out of them all to be the treasurer of that little company. When we choose a treasurer, we try to select a man of probity, of integrity, of honesty, a thoughtful, careful man, a man above reproach.

I have no doubt that for the three years during which Judas companied with the rest of the apostles, as far as his outward behaviour was concerned, none could say a thing against him. We read that he carried the bag, he was the bursar and disburser to whom the Lord committed the great and holy privilege of ministering to the needy, for our blessed Lord and His disciples did not use for themselves all that went into that bag. We read that certain women, "ministered unto Him of their substance." Evidently a great many others did the same thing, and thus provided for them as they itinerated through the country. And the Lord Jesus Christ delighted to meet the needs of others out of what was in the collection for Him.

The Apostle Paul, *on one* occasion, reminded the saints at Ephesus of "the words of our Lord Jesus, how He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" You will never find those words in any of the four Gospels; you never read in the Gospels that Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive," and yet the apostle in speaking to those Ephesian elders said, "Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). This was part of the tradition, the accepted tradition of the early

church. Everywhere the Gospel went, men told how when Jesus was here on earth, it was customary for Him to say, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." The tense of the original implies this: "Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He was *wont to say*, (i.e., He was in the habit of saying), It is more blessed to give than to receive." I fancy He never gave healing to a man, but He said something like that; He never restored sight to the blind, but He made some similar remark, and never whispered to Judas, "You might help that poor person yonder," but what He would add, "Remember, it is more blessed to give than to receive."

Think of the high and holy privileges that pertain to the ministry committed to Judas. He was one of the twelve, chosen out of all the other friends of Christ to be with Him, honoured by the title "Apostle," sent one, messenger,—commissioned by the Lord to carry His Word to the people of Israel. He was one who had very intimate association with the Lord; He was entrusted with the money that was committed to them, and also with the spending of it. He had the privilege of hearing the most marvellous ministry that was ever given forth in this world. He listened that day when the Lord Jesus preached that wonderful Sermon on the Mount; he heard Him unfold His many parables of the Kingdom of Heaven, and the Kingdom of God; he saw His Lord time after time as He bowed in prayer and commended His disciples to the Father, that He might watch over and preserve them. He was so close to the Lord Jesus that he knew who He was, and he was certain that He was the promised Messiah. This was Judas, yet he lost his soul!

You and I may say, "Oh, if we could but have privileges like that; if we could but hear the words of the Son of God; if we did not have to be dependent upon His poor, feeble, human messengers who at the very best come so far short of what He, the blessed Saviour of men must have been, when He was preaching here in the world; if we could have listened to His words, then these cold hearts of ours would be moved; then we would respond to Him; then undoubtedly we would be saved. We are lost because we have not had the privileges that we might have had!"

My dear friend, the greater the privilege, the greater the responsibility, and the greater the privilege, the more is accentuated the true condition of the heart of man. Judas had all these privileges; he was treated with wondrous kindness and confidence by the Lord Jesus Christ, and the apostolic band; and yet he lost his soul. What was the reason? Why was it that this man failed to profit under such wonderful ministry, and that he went out at last a suicide into a lost eternity? I think we may find the trouble very readily as we carefully examine the record.

All through his life there was one sin that Judas had never judged; there was one sin that controlled his inmost being, and in a large measure dictated his behaviour, and that was the sin of covetousness. Covetousness made him a thief during those three years that he accompanied with the Lord, and covetousness made him a traitor at the last. You remember the Word of God says, "The love of money is the root of all evil" (A.V.). I do not think the Greek text will exactly bear that translation. Most scholars are agreed that it should not be rendered quite so strong as that. Instead of "The love of money is the root," it is generally translated, "the love of money is a root for all evil." It simply means that if a man loves money, if he is seeking personal gain, every other kind of iniquity can be grafted on to that root.

Years ago I was setting out a little orchard. My home was in Fruitvale, California, just outside of Oakland, and having a rather large lot, I was very much interested in setting out a number of fruit trees. A man came to sell me some trees, and he said, "The best thing you can do is to use trees that have been grafted upon a wild peach root." We were troubled by gophers, and the wild peach root is so bitter that gophers will not eat it. It is also a suitable root upon which to graft a great many different trees. So in my little orchard I had almond trees, Japanese plum trees, and our ordinary plum trees, German prunes, and two or three kinds of apricots and peaches, all grafted on wild peach roots, and they all flourished. The love of money is something like that. It is that which once it is embedded in the heart of a man may be a suitable root into which to graft every kind of iniquity. If you are a lover of money, you may be willing like Judas to commit theft in order to add to your income. You remember the man who wrote to his son, "My son, get money, honestly if you can, but by all means get money." That is the principle of the covetous man, and that was the sin of Judas.

Judas carried the bag, and we are told, "He bare what was put therein." That word "bare" looks innocent enough, but the meaning of it is really, "he bare *away* what was put therein." That is, when people made contributions, and they were put into the bag, before the money was counted out by the rest, Judas slipped a certain amount of it into his own bag. He abstracted some of it. He was a thief, and he bare away what was put therein. Just imagine that man, that covetous man, that thief, that dishonest man, sitting day after day under the ministry of the blessed Christ of God, and yet never converted.

"Why," you say, "do you not think Judas ever was a child of God?" Oh no, the Lord Jesus makes that very plain. He says, "Have not I chosen

you twelve, and one of you is a *devil*?" He did not say, "One of you is in danger of becoming a devil." The word "devil" means a false accuser, a traitor, and Judas is distinctly called, "Judas the *traitor*." But his treachery and his evil speaking grew out of that one sin of covetousness, and that was the sin that kept the Word of God from ever finding lodgment in his soul.

If, as Judas listened to some of those wonderful sermons of the Lord Jesus; if, as he listened to those wonderful stories; if, as he heard of that rich man who said, "What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? ... I will pull down my barns, and build greater, and I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease; eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall these things be, which thou hast provided?" (Luke 12:17-20); if conscience had only become active as Judas listened to those words; if he had only heeded the voice of the Holy Spirit, and had said to himself, "Yes, I, too, am in danger of being lost eternally, because of covetousness," and had sought out the Lord, and bared his breast to Him, and said, "Blessed Master, Thou hast chosen me to be one of Thy apostles; outwardly I have behaved myself, and, perhaps, none of my fellow apostles have guessed the secret sin that has been eating into my very being, which unless judged is going to destroy me for ever; but I come to Thee now, although so late; I come to Thee to confess that all the time I have been with Thee I have been a corrupt, unprincipled, wicked man; I have been a covetous man; I have been a dishonest man; I have been stealing out of the treasury of the Lord. O Christ of God, is there forgiveness for a man like me?"

How different the history of Judas might have been! Depend upon it, there would have been salvation even for him if he would have faced his sin in the presence of God, before he crossed over the dead line, and it was too late.

I wonder if any of you are in danger of being lost eternally by the same sin that damned Judas. Has the love of money gripped your heart? Are you, too, allowing yourself to stoop to things that are discreditable and dishonest in business, possibly in your dealings with others, in order that you may accumulate wealth? Remember, some day that money will burn your very soul, as though it were fire. We read, "The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death" (Prov. 21:6). And again we are told that, "He that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool" (Jer. 17:11). Judas put money in the place of Christ; he put money in the place of his own salvation, and lost the

money at last, and lost also his soul.

When you come to the closing hours of Judas' life, what a solemn picture you have. Jesus has come down to Jerusalem for the last time, and has been saying things that have perplexed Judas; he cannot understand what the Lord has in mind. He has been speaking of dying, of rising again in three days, of being rejected by the chief priests and by the elders, and Judas said, "What, is this going to be the end of all our expectations? If He is rejected and put to death, what about those of us who have kept company with Him? What chance will we have?" And Judas made up his mind that he would get out from under, as we say to-day, while the getting was good.

He sought out the chief priest and said, "Tell me, what will you give me if I betray Him to you?" Out of the sin of covetousness came the other sin of putting self in the place of Christ. "What will you give ME if I betray Him unto you?" So they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. You say, "Was that a very large amount of money?" Not very large. In the Old Testament it is the price of an ox, or of a slave. If a man had inadvertently killed a slave, he was to pay to the master thirty pieces of silver. That is what Judas obtained for betraying the Lord. There is many a one to-day who is betraying Him for less than that. Thirty pieces of silver—that is a fortune compared with what some are getting for the betrayal of the Christ of God. When you think of people selling Jesus for a little paltry worldly pleasure, selling their hope of Heaven for some brief carnal enjoyment, selling their souls for sensual delight, you have something of far less value than thirty pieces of silver.

Try to imagine Judas making his bargain, and then coming back into the very presence of the Son of God, trying to look as though nothing had happened, taking his place with the rest as though he were a lover of Jesus. Conscience at times would try to rouse him, but he had refused to listen to its voice until it became seared as with a hot iron. And even that last night he went with the rest of the apostles to that upper room where the Lord Jesus ate the Passover. He, possibly, partook of that mystic feast that told of the sacrificial offer of the true Lamb of God, though doubtless he did not understand it, and there he received the last act of kindness at the hand of his blessed Lord. Jesus washed his feet in a basin of water, and wiped them with a towel wherewith He was girded. Think of His love, His amazing grace! He knew what had taken place; He knew of the visit to the chief priests; He knew of the bargain that had been struck, and yet He would see whether this last act of love would break down this godless hardened rebel. He washed his feet, taking the place of a slave to do His recreant

apostle service; and then, in order to arouse conscience, and to let him know that He knew what had taken place, He said as He looked sorrowfully around, "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you shall betray me?" I think Judas' heart began to thump at that, and he thought, "Is He going to expose me before the rest of them?" But no, Jesus was not going to expose; Jesus was giving Judas *one last opportunity* to expose the corruption of his own heart, to confess his own sin, and still get right with God, but Judas sat and listened; he even leaned forward and said with the blandest kind of effrontery, as the others put the same question, "Lord, is it I?"

Then Jesus, seeing that all hope of reaching that man was now for ever gone, said, "He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it. And when he had dipped the sop, he gave it to Judas Iscariot" (John 13:26). And Judas having received the sop went out immediately, and it was night.

Jesus said, as he left the room, "That thou doest, do quickly." And the other apostles did not understand. They thought He was referring to some act of loving kindness, possibly ministering to the poor, or providing something for their food for the morrow during the Passover week. But Judas knew, and with those words ringing in his ears he went out—*and it was night!*

Night, blacker and darker than he had ever known, had settled down upon Judas' soul. It was not merely that the sun of the universe had withdrawn itself, and this earthly light was hidden from him, but it was night in his soul, for now Judas is given up, and he has become the son of perdition. There is no longer hope; he has crossed the dead line. He sought out the chief priest, and said, "I know where He is. He has gone from the supper to Gethsemane's garden. I have often been with Him there."

If the chief priest had said, "And what did He do when He was there?" Judas would have replied, "He would kneel on the ground and pray; He would pray for me, for my fellow disciples, for you and for the nation of Israel. I know where He will be; I know what He will be doing."

But all this failed to move him. Scripture says, "Exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb. 3:13). Every time you hear the Word of God, and refuse to admit Christ into your heart it becomes harder; every time your sin is brought home to your conscience, and you refuse to judge it, it becomes easier to go on in sin. This hardening process had been going on in Judas' life for three years, and now his

heart will never be moved to penitence again.

You know the rest of the story of how he led that company out to Gethsemane. Jesus had hardly risen from that awful agony of prayer when the sweat as great drops of blood fell from His brow, as He pleaded with the Father on our behalf, and said, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt" (Matt. 26:39). Judas met Him, and whispered to those with him, "Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is He: hold Him fast" (Matt. 26:48). And he went boldly forward, made his way into the company of the disciples, right up to the blessed Saviour, and without a tremor said, "Hail, Master," and he dared to kiss Him. Jesus, instead of calling down the fires of divine judgment upon him, said, "Judas, betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss?" But there was no answering response in the heart of Judas. *He was out for thirty pieces of silver.*

His Lord is led away to die; the dreadful scenes of Calvary are enacted. And Judas, what of him? At last his conscience is awakened, but without penitence, without confession to God, without true repentance, for the word that is translated "repent" there simply means that Judas was filled with *remorse*, when at last he realised what he had actually done, and he came like a crazed man into the presence of the chief priest, and threw down the thirty pieces of silver for which he had sold his Lord, and his soul, and he said, "I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood."

But his heart never turned to God, never cried to Him for mercy; he simply acknowledged the awful blunder he had made. The priest turned coldly away and said, "What is that to us, see thou to it." And Judas rushed out of their presence with his brain on fire, maddened as he realised what he had done, and going to the edge of the cliff, if tradition teaches us aright, he found a gnarled tree, and with a noose hung himself to the limb. As his body dropped into space, the noose broke, and his body was torn to pieces, and thus you have the two distinct accounts of his death reconciled, "he hung himself, " and "he was torn asunder."

Judas, lost, lost for ever, because of one unjudged sin.

If you are still out of Christ, what is the sin that is keeping you from giving heed to the Gospel message? Have you been moved by the Spirit of God at different times to desire to know the salvation of the Lord, and has something seemed to say to you, "If you should become a Christian, you would have to give up this, and that, and the other thing? You would have to confess the wrong that you did to this one

and to that one?" It is not that you have to do these things. If you become a Christian, you will be glad to face everything in the presence of God, and seek to put things right, but God is not calling upon you to put things right before you come to Him. He is calling on you to *receive* His Son, and depend upon it, when you do that, you will want to have things right with man.

Recently a man was brought to know Christ, and a few weeks ago he came to one of my associates and said, "Now that I know the Lord, I want to be out and out for Christ, but there is something I will have to straighten up. I was a soldier in the Army, and got into trouble. They put me into prison, but I broke away with others, and deserted, and I have been dodging the officers. But now God has found me, and saved me; and I want to be right with men."

So, at his own request, my associate took him back to the officials of the government, and there like a man he went in and told his story and said, "I have come back to give myself up." They put him under arrest, and his case is now being taken up. The very next day as they put him to work on the rock pile, he brought the man who worked beside him to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is a missionary even though he has gone to prison.

You know what sin is keeping you from Christ. We saw that the sin which kept Herod from Him was the sin of licentiousness, of impurity, that sin that is damning so many millions of men and women to-day. It is clear that the sin that ruined Pontius Pilate was the sin of worldly ambition, and now we have the awful picture of Judas Iscariot damned because of covetousness.

What Is YOUR Sin?

You may try to excuse it; you may say, "After all, it is a little thing," but, if it keeps you from coming to Christ, it will keep you out of heaven, and you won't think it a little thing in eternity. Then you will say, "What a fool I have been."

Will you not face your sin in the presence of God? Jesus died for it whatever it is, and if you will only come to Him as a penitent sinner, and put your trust in Him, there is no sin you have ever committed that can rise again between your soul and God. "The Blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). Will you come to Him? "To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His Name *whosoever* believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins" (Acts 10:43). Will you come?

Suppose you do not. How will you like to have to spend eternity with Herod the impure, with Pilate the ambitious, with Judas Iscariot, the covetous traitor? That must be your doom if you refuse the salvation that God is offering.

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