

To Seek and to Save the Lost

The Plot to Kill Jesus

Luke 22:1-6

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Scripture

It was the final week of Jesus' life, just days before his death. All of the public attempts of the various groups of religious leaders to discredit Jesus had failed completely, and they no longer dared ask him any question (Luke 20:40). Jesus warned his disciples, in the hearing of all the people, to beware of the religious leaders because of their pride, greed, and hypocrisy (Luke 20:45-46). Jesus also affirmed the sacrificial generosity of a poor widow (Luke 21:1-4). Then Jesus and his disciples left the temple, crossed the Kidron valley, and went up the Mount of Olives where he taught the lesson we call "The Olivet Discourse" (Luke 21:5-38).

In Luke 22 the focus shifts from Jesus' interaction with the religious leaders and teaching of his disciples to the events that lead up to Jesus' death on the cross (Luke 22-23), followed by the account of Jesus' resurrection from the dead (Luke 24). It all began with the plot to kill Jesus.

Let's read about the plot to kill Jesus in Luke 22:1-6:

¹ Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called the Passover. ² And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to put him to death, for they feared the people.

³ Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve. ⁴ He went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray him to them. ⁵ And they were glad, and agreed to give him money. ⁶ So he consented and sought an opportunity to betray him to them in the absence of a crowd. (Luke 22:1-6)

Introduction

In his commentary on the Gospel of Luke Dr. Philip Ryken says that sometime in the late 1970s, an ancient document was stolen

from an Egyptian tomb. It was sold to an antiquities dealer and then passed from one dealer to another until scholars finally identified it as a copy of the long-lost Gospel of Judas.

We first read about the Gospel of Judas in the second-century writings of Irenaeus, who said it was rejected by the church because it was not in agreement with the biblical Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. In fact, the Gospel of Judas is not really a gospel at all because it does not tell the good news about the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which is what a gospel is. The story simply ends at the point when Judas handed Jesus over to the Jews. There is no cross or empty tomb in the manuscript, and therefore no forgiveness of sins or hope of eternal life.

Instead, this heretical document is a desperate attempt to make Judas the hero who delivered Jesus from having to live in a physical body by handing him over to be killed. According to the Gospel of Judas, these two men were the best of friends, and Judas betrayed Jesus only because Jesus asked him to do it. Judas and Jesus had many private conversations during the last week of their lives, in which Jesus told Judas many secrets that he never shared with any of the other disciples. This is because Judas was the most important disciple – the only one who really understood Jesus. “Step away from the others,” Jesus said to him, “and I shall tell you the mysteries of the kingdom. It is possible for you to reach it.”¹

Ryken comments:

All of this is utter nonsense, of course – a blatant contradiction of everything the Bible says about both Judas and Jesus. The people promoting this false gospel are trying to rehabilitate Judas by saying that he was never really the villain that Christians say he was; he was just misunderstood. But what these scholars are really doing is betraying Jesus all over again by calling something a gospel that fails to give people any good news.²

¹ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, vol. 2, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 447–448.

² Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, 448.

If we want to know what the gospel really is, what the good news really is, we need to look at what the Bible says. The Bible clearly and consistently teaches that Judas was not a hero at all. In fact, Judas betrayed the Son of God and was part of the plot to kill Jesus.

Lesson

The analysis of the plot to kill Jesus in Luke 22:1-6 alerts us to several dangers.

Let's use the following outline:

1. The Attempt to Kill Jesus (22:1-2)
2. The Agreement to Kill Jesus (22:3-6)

I. The Attempt to Kill Jesus (22:1-2)

First, let's look at the attempt to kill Jesus.

Luke said in verse 1, "**Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called the Passover.**"

The **Feast of Unleavened Bread** and the **Passover** were originally separate festivals, but were regarded as one in practice. **Passover** is always on the 14th day of the Jewish month of Nisan (roughly March-April), and Nisan 14 (by Jewish reckoning) would have extended from Thursday sundown to Friday sundown. The **Feast of Unleavened Bread** lasted from Nisan 15 to Nisan 21 (from Friday sundown until the following Thursday at sundown).

Passover commemorated the deliverance of the people of Israel from their slavery in Egypt (see Exodus 12). On that night the angel of death killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast. However, in order to preserve the life of the firstborn in their families God told the people of Israel that they were to kill an unblemished lamb and spread its blood on the lintels and door posts of their homes. When the angel of death saw the blood, he would *pass over* them and spare the life of the firstborn. Because the meal was eaten

in haste, there was no time to bake bread with leaven. And so the people of God ate unleavened bread before the exodus out of Egypt. Furthermore, the people were to commemorate the Passover forever.

In Jesus' day elaborate preparations were made for the Passover festival. According to commentator William Barclay, roads were repaired and bridges were made safe. Tombs along the side of the roads were whitewashed so that traveling pilgrims could see them, because if they touched them, they would become unclean, and they would not be able to participate in the Passover festival.

During the month leading up to the Passover, the story and meaning of the Passover was the subject of the teaching of every synagogue.

And then, two days before the Passover there was in every house a ceremonial search for leaven. The householder took a candle and solemnly searched every nook and cranny in silence, and the last particle of leaven was thrown out.

Every male Jew who lived within fifteen miles of Jerusalem, was bound by law to attend the Passover. But it was the ambition of every Jew in every part of the world (as it is still) to come to the Passover in Jerusalem at least once in a lifetime. To this day, when Jews keep the Passover in every land they pray that they may keep it next year in Jerusalem.

Because of this vast numbers came to Jerusalem for the Passover festival. Cestius was governor of Palestine in the time of Nero, and Nero tended to belittle the importance of the Jewish faith. To convince Nero of it, Cestius took a census of the lambs slain at one particular Passover. Josephus tells us that the number was 256,500. The law laid it down that the minimum number for a Passover celebration was ten. That means that on this occasion, if these figures are correct, there must have been more than 2,700,000 pilgrims to the Passover. Even though Josephus was given to exaggeration, the point is still that there were an enormous number of pilgrims in Jerusalem during the Passover.

And so it was in this crowded city of Jerusalem that the drama

of the last days of Jesus was played out.³

The religious leaders' frustration with Jesus had been growing over the years. Shortly after Jesus began his ministry of preaching and healing, the Pharisees and the scribes complained to him about the behavior of his disciples (see Luke 5:33). Then the scribes and Pharisees watched Jesus closely so that they could catch him breaking their understanding of the Law (see Luke 6:7). Later on, the religious leaders were "lying in wait for him, to catch him in something he might say" (Luke 11:54).

Over the course of his short, three-year ministry, opposition to Jesus increased vehemently. In the days leading up to the Passover the religious leaders did everything in their power to discredit Jesus. In fact, Luke noted that "the chief priests and the scribes and the principal men of the people were seeking to destroy him" (Luke 19:47). It climaxed with Luke's comment in verse 2a, **"And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to put him to death."**

The reason the religious leaders could not simply arrest Jesus and have him put to death is because **"they feared the people"** (22:2b). Jesus was so popular with the people, and the religious leaders knew that they would have a riot on their hands if they tried to kill Jesus. Moreover, the Romans would have been all over the religious leaders if there had been any kind of disturbance in the city of Jerusalem.

All of this background leads me to observe the first danger. I am following Bishop J. C. Ryle, who said, "High offices in the church do not preserve the holders of them from great blindness and sin."⁴ Luke noted that the first ones to seek actively the death of Jesus were the religious leaders. The very ones who should have welcomed Jesus as the messiah, the Christ, the one sent by God the Father to seek and to save the lost, were the very ones who plotted to kill Jesus. The shepherds of God's people who should have rejoiced at the coming of the

³ William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 311.

⁴ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke*, vol. 2 (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1879), 388.

Lamb of God were the ones who sought to cut him down. The religious leaders who studied God's word and taught it to the people were the ones who turned God's Son away from God's people.

Bishop Ryle rightly warns God's people by saying, "Let us beware of attaching an excessive importance to ministers of religion because of their office. Orders and rank confer no exemption from error. The greatest heresies have been sown, and the greatest practical abuses introduced into the church by ordained men."⁵ Of course it is appropriate to respect the office of those who are ordained. But, just because a person is ordained does not mean that he is free from error.

All teachers of God's word must be examined in light of God's word. That is why I say that you must not believe anything I say just because I say it; you must check to see that everything I say is in accordance with God's word.

When the apostle Paul went from Thessalonica to Berea and taught the people there, we read these words in Acts 17:11 (*NIV*), "Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true."

Now, if people were checking the *apostle's* teaching against the word of God, then you certainly should check mine as well.

II. The Agreement to Kill Jesus (22:3-6)

Second, let's examine the agreement to kill Jesus.

Because the religious leaders feared the people, and they did not want to cause a riot, they were not able to find a way to kill Jesus. But then, unexpectedly, Judas, one of the twelve apostles came to the religious leaders and offered to betray Jesus to them.

There seems to be two reasons for Judas being willing to betray Jesus to the religious leaders.

⁵ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke*, vol. 2, 389.

A. *A Diabolical Reason (22:3)*

First, there was a diabolical reason.

Luke said in verse 3, **“Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve.”**

Luke did not elaborate on what is meant by **Satan who entered into Judas**. Commentator Darrell Bock says, “The meaning of this expression is not entirely clear, but its import is: Judas came under the control of the spiritual personification of evil, Satan. Judas acts and is responsible, but Satan is the impetus.”⁶

And this brings me to observe the second danger, noted by Bishop Ryle: “See how far men may fall after making a high profession.”⁷ The second step in the plot to kill Jesus was treachery by one of Jesus’ one apostles. Judas was not initially one of those who were opposed by Jesus. He was chosen by Jesus to be with him for three years. He followed Jesus during his entire three-year ministry. He left everything and followed Jesus. He heard Jesus preach and teach on innumerable occasions. He saw Jesus heal people countless times. He saw Jesus raise dead people back to life. He saw Jesus exercise power over nature. He saw Jesus exercise authority over sin itself by forgiving people. And he even saw Jesus exercise authority over demons. He saw it all! And he heard it all! There was nothing to distinguish him from Peter and James and John and the other apostles. In fact, some even say that he was considered the leader of the twelve because he was given responsibility for the finances of the group. To all outward appearances Judas was a committed follower of Jesus. And yet he turned out to be the one who betrayed the Son of God into the hands of men.

Judas ought to cause every professing Christian to examine himself daily to see whether he is in fact a genuine Christian. Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, and he urged them to “examine yourselves

⁶ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: 9:51–24:53*, vol. 2, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), 1703–1704.

⁷ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke*, vol. 2, 389.

to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves” (2 Corinthians 13:5). A true Christian is united to Jesus by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

Satan is of course able to tempt all people, including Christians, to do that which is sinful. Christians sometimes do fall prey to the temptation of Satan, as Peter did when he denied knowing Jesus after Jesus had been arrested. But the difference between Peter and Judas is that Peter repented of his sin, whereas Judas never repented, and went and hanged himself.

B. A Financial Reason (22:4-6)

And second, there was a financial reason.

At some point, presumably during the days leading up to Passover, Judas **went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray Jesus to them.** Understandably, **they were glad,** because this was the breakthrough they were seeking. They would be able to arrest Jesus away from the crowds. So, the religious leaders **agreed to give Judas money.** We know from Matthew’s Gospel that it was “thirty pieces of silver” (Matthew 26:15), which was the going rate for a common slave in those days. **So Judas consented and sought an opportunity to betray Jesus to the religious leaders in the absence of a crowd (22:4-6).**

And here is the third danger I want us to observe, as noted by Bishop Ryle: “We see the enormous power of the love of money.”⁸ There is nothing sinful about money in itself. It is *the love of money* that is the problem. The problem is, as Paul wrote to Timothy in 1 Timothy 6:10, “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.” And how true that was of Judas.

In fact, the apostle John said that even though Judas was in

⁸ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke*, vol. 2 (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1879), 390.

charge of the group's finances, he actually was a thief, and helped himself to finances. Six days before the Passover, Jesus was at the home of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. During the dinner in their home Mary anointed Jesus' feet with very expensive ointment. Judas said that the ointment should have been sold and the money given to the poor. However, the apostle John noted that Judas said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it (John 12:6).

We need to watch and pray against the love of money. And this is not just a danger for those who are rich. The love of money is a danger for rich and poor alike. It is possible to love money without having it. Let us heed the admonition of the writer to the Hebrews in Hebrews 13:5, "Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'"

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the plot to kill Jesus in Luke 22:1-6, we should examine ourselves, to see whether we are in the faith.

One of the well-known Presbyterian preachers in the early part of the twentieth century was Dr. Clarence Macartney. He was the pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh, PA for thirty years. In one of his books, *Great Nights of the Bible*, Dr. Macartney imagined himself being carried away in a dream to the Holy City of God, the New Jerusalem. This is how he described his dream:

In my dream I was carried away to a great and high mountain where I saw that great city: the goal of all our hopes and desires, the end of our salvation, the Holy City of God, the New Jerusalem. Around the city, as around the earthly Jerusalem, there ran a wall great and high. There were twelve gates, north, south, east, and west; and every gate was a pearl, and at every gate stood one of the Great Angels. On the gates were written the names of the Twelve Tribes of the Children

of Israel, from Reuben to Benjamin. The wall of the city stood upon twelve massive foundation stones, and on each stone was the name of one of the Twelve Apostles of the Lamb; and as I walked around the city, thrilling with joy and rapture at the glory and splendor of it, I read the names written upon the twelve stones – Peter, James, John, and all the others. But one name was missing. I looked in vain for that name, either on the twelve gates or on the twelve foundation stones – and that name was Judas.⁹

Judas' name was missing because he was the one who betrayed Jesus to the religious leaders. Contrary to the heretical Gospel of Judas, Judas was no hero. Though he had a front-row seat to the life and ministry of Jesus, and though he appeared to be in a right relationship with Jesus, he was in fact lost for all eternity.

Where do you stand in relationship to Jesus? Do you associate with him, but not really know him personally and really? Do you attend worship and participate in church ministry, but you really are not united to Jesus by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone?

I invite you to repent of your sin and put your trust in Jesus today. Amen.

⁹ Clarence Edward Macartney, *Great Nights of the Bible* (New York: Abingdon, 1953), 85-86.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

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PRAYER:

O Lord our God, as we look back today, it is hard for us to understand how anyone could want to hurt, harm, or even kill your precious Son. He was without sin and was the most loving, gracious, kind, and merciful person who ever walked this earth. And yet Judas betrayed him for thirty pieces of silver.

O God, help us to examine our own hearts. Help us to see if there be any wicked way in us.

And, O God, if anyone is not right with you, will you grant that person faith and repentance today?

And for this I pray in Jesus' name.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!