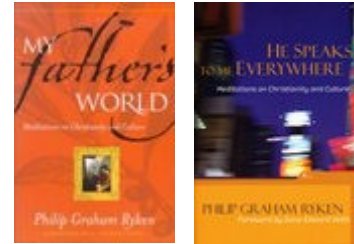


Window on the World

Window on the World is our weekly opportunity to examine our culture from the vantage point of biblical Christianity. Here you will find the text from Dr. Ryken's "Window on the World" talks from Tenth Presbyterian Church's evening service. If you missed one or wanted to send a copy to a friend, you will be able to find them here. Please note: there is no "Window on the World" on third Sundays, selected other Sundays, or in July and August.

Windows on the World before September 2005 are available in an older format. [Click here](#). Many of these are now published in [My Father's World: Meditations on Christianity and Culture](#) (P&R Publishing, 2002) and in [He Speaks to Me Everywhere: Meditations on Christianity and Culture](#) (P&R Publishing, 2004) by Philip Graham Ryken.



The Judas We Never Knew

Dr. Philip Ryken



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Full Text:

Judas Iscariot was the last of the original twelve disciples of Jesus of Nazareth, also called the Christ (Matt. 10:1–4). He accompanied Jesus throughout most of his earthly ministry. He was there, presumably, when Jesus walked on water, fed the five thousand, and raised Lazarus from the dead. He was certainly there when Mary anointed Jesus with perfume. We know this because John tells us that when Judas saw what she was doing, he said, "Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" (John 12:5). John also tells us *why* 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).

But what we remember most about Judas are the things that happened in the last days of his life: his secret meeting with the chief priests (Matt. 26:14); the bargaining price for his betrayal (Matt. 26:15); his early departure from the Last Supper (John 13:26–30); and his infamous kiss in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:47–48). We also remember what happened afterwards. Filled with remorse, Judas told the chief priests that he had sinned by betraying innocent blood (Matt. 27:3–4). Then he went out and hanged himself (Matt. 27:5). Judas Iscariot was the villain who betrayed Jesus Christ unto death.

Or was he? A recently discovered manuscript—the so-called *Gospel of Judas*—claims that Judas was in fact a hero, and that Jesus revealed to him alone the secrets of salvation. What difference does this long lost text make to our understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ?

There seems to be little doubt that the manuscript is authentic. Apparently it was stolen from an Egyptian tomb sometime in the 1970's, and it has been in the hands of various antiquities dealers since then. When legitimate scholars finally saw the document, they immediately recognized the script as coming from the second or third century. Subsequent carbon-14 dating of the ink and papyrus has confirmed this by dating the manuscript to

somewhere between A.D. 220 and A.D. 340.

The original text is probably even older. Writing back in the second century, Irenaeus mentioned the *Gospel of Judas* in an important work called *Against Heresies*. According to Irenaeus, the *Gospel of Judas* was rejected by the church because it was not in agreement with the canonical gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The newly discovered text gives every appearance of being a copy of the same book that was familiar to Irenaeus.

Now we know what the *Gospel of Judas* actually says. It says that Judas and Jesus were the best of friends, and that Judas only handed Jesus over to the religious authorities because Jesus asked him to do it. It says that 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 his other disciples. It says that Judas was the most important disciple—the only one who really understood Jesus. For example, Jesus reportedly said to him, “Step away from the others and I shall tell you the mysteries of the kingdom. It is possible for you to reach it.”

The *Gospel of Judas* also says that in handing Jesus over to the authorities, Judas liberated him from the flesh of his physical body so that he could become a pure spirit. This seems to be what Jesus means when he says to Judas, “You will exceed all of them. For you will sacrifice the man that clothes me.”

None of this is at all surprising—not because it does not contradict everything we know about Judas from the New Testament (obviously, it does), but because it agrees with everything we already know about the Gnostic heresies of Egyptian religion.

The Gnostics (from *gnosis*, the Greek word for knowledge) promised to give their followers inside information—secret spiritual knowledge that was only disclosed to someone who was initiated into the rites of their religion. The Gnostics also denigrated the human body, believing that the spirit was always pure, while the flesh was inherently sinful.

Gnostic spirituality is the antithesis of orthodox Christianity, which presents the gospel of Jesus Christ as a fact of history that is accessible to anyone who will take the trouble to read what the Bible says. Biblical Christianity also refuses to dishonor the bodies that God has made in his image. We believe that our souls have fallen into sin, and that this brings our bodies into corruption and finally death. But we also believe that by the power of the resurrection, God will raise us up from the dead, redeeming our bodies as well as our souls.

You will not read about any of this in the *Gospel of Judas*, however, because it mentions neither the crucifixion nor the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Instead, it ends rather abruptly. Judas hands Jesus over, but we are never told what happens to either of them afterwards. This means, of course, that the manuscript doesn't really deserve to be called a gospel. Rather, it is the kind of “gospel” that the apostle Paul warned about—one that is “no gospel at all” (Gal. 1:7 NIV). How can *Judas* be categorized as a gospel if it doesn't tell the gospel story of the salvation that Jesus accomplished by dying on the cross and rising from the grave?

Yet predictably, and thanks in part to the National Geographic Society, the *Gospel of Judas* is receiving plenty of hype in the popular media. No doubt some people will say that the church has suppressed the true story of Judas (even though the false gospels of the Egyptian Gnostics were written many years after the New Testament). Others will say that Judas was really the victim, and not the villain; he wasn't bad, you see, he was just misunderstood.

This is a lie that comes straight from Satan—the very same Satan who entered Judas on the night that he betrayed Jesus Christ. At least, that's what it says in one of the real gospels (see John 13:27).

[Information for this Window on the World comes from Thomas H. Maugh, “Judas redefined,” *Los Angeles Times* (April 7, 2006)]