

Judas – By Comparison

The Twelve Apostles

By Joel Van Hoogen

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: John 12:1-11
Preached on: Tuesday, July 16, 2002

Bread of Life Fellowship
1021 East State Street
Boise, ID 83705

Website: www.breadoflifeboise.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/bol

See what God wants to teach us from their lives, so this morning we're going to look at Judas and we're going to do some things that in our looking at Judas that may be a little challenging to you. The fact is, is that at the time of Christ's death there are a number of figures who are swirling around the scene and swirling around the life of Jesus Christ, and at any given moment we can see ourselves and we can identify ourselves with those individuals who find themselves around this person of Jesus Christ during the time of that week which we call his Passion Week up until the point of his crucifixion and even after that in his resurrection. We can identify ourselves with Peter and with his boast and with his crushing defeat. We can identify ourselves with Thomas and with his doubting. We can identify ourselves with Mary and with her mourning. We can even identify ourselves with Pilate and with his predicament that he was in where he had a desire to please the crowd. Have you ever been that way where you desired to please the crowd? We can identify ourselves with the crowd even that cried out and yelled out to crucify him and we can see that our sins as well as theirs sent Jesus to the cross. We can relate to them all, all of them but one. The one man's sin which is so grave and so incredible in light of the light that he was given in such a way that it is difficult for us to identify with this one man, we find it difficult to identify with Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Jesus Christ.

I've heard a lot of individuals who have compared their sins with the sins of David but I've never heard an individual who has compared his sins with the sins of Judas, and yet this morning we are going to pause and we're going to take a moment to do the unthinkable, we're going to compare ourselves with Judas. The fact is that oftentimes we've taken the sin of Judas and we have turned it into some kind of mythical betrayal that goes beyond, that somehow extends itself outside of all historical proportion, but Judas was a man. He was a man filled with positive characteristics. He was a man who was chosen to be one of Jesus' twelve disciples, not because of what he would do, that is, because he was going to protect Jesus, but because of who he could be. Judas had within him all the potential to be one of the twelve foundational figures upon which Christ was to build his church. No, Judas was a man just like us who had tremendous potential and he was filled with complex interests and desires and he was sincere in his own mind in that he initially at least wanted to follow Jesus Christ, and so today what I'd like to do is I'd like us to look at the life of Judas and I'd like us to be so bold and so willing as not to

somehow compartmentalize his life and look at it as some strange anomaly that is flashed across the scene of history, but to look at it in such a way that we would consider that as we look at it we are viewing something that may be a common story in the history of mankind and something that we could ourselves even relate to.

So before we do that, I'd like to have us turn to John chapter 12 and I want to read one excerpt that tells us something about the life of Judas. John chapter 12, verse 1. We'll read down through verse 11.

Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead. There they made him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with him. Then Mary took a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, [and we'll read also in the Gospel of Mark that she began first to pour it upon his head] and she wiped his feet with her hair, and the house was filled with the odor of the ointment. Then said one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, who should betray him, Why was not this ointment sold for 300 denarii and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief and had the bag, [that means he was the treasurer of this band,] and bore what was put in it. Then said Jesus, Let her alone, for the day of my burial has she kept this. For the poor always have you with you, but me you have not always. Many people of the Jews therefore knew that he was there, and they came not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might see Lazarus also whom he had raised from the dead. But the chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death, because by reason of him, many of the Jews went away and believed on Jesus.

Now in the Gospel of Mark, we have the same account given to us, but Mark shares with us that it was at this point in time that Judas went out from the house and began to consult with the high priest, the chief priest, how it is that he may find a convenient time to turn Jesus over into their hands. Well, this is just one of the passages we're going to consider.

Well, let's look at this life of Judas and let's give a historical review to some extent; we can draw different accounts out from all the scriptures and it will give us an idea of this life of Judas. The first thing we know is this, that for the first year of Christ's public ministry, after he was baptized by John, he didn't have a band of twelve apostles that he appointed. That didn't happen until the end of the first year of his ministry. But during that first year of his ministry, we're taught in the Bible that Jesus began to go out into the different villages and the different towns and he began to preach the message that John was preaching which was repent and be baptized in the name of the Lord and to repent and turn to prepare themselves for the kingdom that God had brought among them. And during this time also, Jesus began to perform the miracles that drew men to himself. We read of all kinds of multiple miracles that he performed, healing diseases, and to curing lepers, and giving sight to the blind, and curing the limp legs of the lame, and of drawing out fevered from the sick people, and raising up those who were on their deathbed, and

casting out demons, and all this that we read about are things that took place before Jesus appointed his twelve disciples. And during this time of public ministry that took place for about a year, as Jesus was teaching and as Jesus was preaching and as Jesus was touching the lives of others, there began to be a band of individuals who began to follow him. They saw in him the one whom they thought may have potential to be the promised Messiah, maybe this is the one whom God said he would send who would be the anointed ruler for the nation of Israel. And so individuals were drawn to him and a rumor began to spread and one person talked to them, "Maybe this is the one who's coming. This is the one whom John the Baptist was talking of." John the Baptist when he saw Jesus pointed to him and said, "This is the one who I've been referring to. Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. This is one whose very shoes and sandals I'm not worthy to unloose." And all these things were said and even John himself was pointing those who were beginning to follow him away to follow Jesus. And so a crowd began to gather around him and at this time, Jesus began to give his call for people to follow him. He said to men like James and to men like Peter to leave their fishing nets aside and to, "Come and follow me and I'll make you fishers of men."

So it was during this first year of ministry that individuals gathered to Jesus, seeing in him a hope for all their aspirations and dreams and finding themselves wonderfully drawn to him, and one of those men was the man Judas Iscariot from a town called Kerioth in the region of Judea. And Judas was seeing as he looked at Jesus and witnessed him and followed him, he was having within him kindled a flame of hope that was burning up and rising up within him, believing that Christ may be the Messiah. One day Judas was along with the crowd when they came to the Sea of Galilee and there a great crowd gathered before Jesus as Jesus instructed him, and at the end of the day, as evening came, Jesus went away from the crowd and went up on a mountainside or a hillside above the Sea of Galilee and the crowd stayed below, and they kind of set out camp there below where they made their tents and they made places to provide for themselves to lie down and sleep because they wanted to be there when he came down the next morning. And Judas was among this crowd and others were there as well and Luke chapter 6 tells us that when Jesus went into the mountain that he spent all night praying and seeking God's will and direction because the next day Jesus was going to appoint the twelve that would be the foundation stone for the movement that he was building, the church that he was going to build.

The next day came and Judas got the call along with eleven other men that Jesus wanted him to join him on the mountain, and so he went up with these twelve other men and there Jesus told them that they were the twelve apostles, he gave them the name apostles that he had called out to lead his new movement. And so he chose Peter and Andrew and James and John and Philip and Bartholomew, who we also call Nathaniel, and Matthew and Thomas and James, the son of Altheus and Simon and Judas, whom we also call Thaddeus and also Judas Iscariot. And these twelve men began to travel with Jesus for three more years in his public ministry and there they received all of his attention as he carefully gave them instruction, and they walked with Jesus, and they ate with Jesus, and they slept with Jesus, and they prayed with him, and they generally lived with Jesus all of the time and during this time their hearts were being drawn to him, their affections were

being knit around the heart of Jesus Christ and Jesus was interweaving into their own hearts his own affections and his own desires for them. And before him, their lives were being exposed before Jesus and Jesus was counseling them and instructing them and teaching them, and we have to believe that just as Jesus took men like Peter aside and spoke to them, that Jesus took other disciples aside and gave them counsel and personal instruction and there was this intimacy that was expanding and growing between them. They witnessed all of his miracles. They overheard all the instruction that he gave to others. They saw how he confounded religious leaders as again and again they came and tried to undermine his ministry and destroy his reputation among the masses. They saw it all. Judas experienced all of this. Judas saw all of this. And the disciples, these apostles, these twelve made huge sacrifices to follow Jesus during this time. They had to leave behind jobs and security and family members and parents and wives and children and homes and friends and reputations all in order to follow Jesus Christ. In Mark chapter 10 verse 28, Peter says this, "Look," to Jesus, "we have left everything to follow you," and Peter was speaking of all of the apostles, including Judas. Judas had made the same kind of sacrifice to follow Jesus.

It's very interesting that the other eleven apostles who were following Jesus, for the most part, remained with Jesus in the region of Galilee, which was their home region. But Judas had come from Judea, the southeastern edge of Judea. Judas had come further distance than all of them to come to be in Jesus' presence. He had gone further away from the comfortable environs that he grew up in and knew in order to be with Jesus. They had made tremendous sacrifices to follow Christ and at least initially Judas had left everything he had in order to follow Jesus.

Early on it was clear that Judas was gifted administratively, and so it was decided that although there were no special positions that were given to any of the apostles, there was no special assignment, no one was on a higher tier or a higher level than any of the others, that there was one individual who was given a special place or position of honor, and that was Judas. Judas was chosen among the twelve, as John chapter 12 verse 6 tells us, Judas was chosen to be the treasurer of the ministry. And during this first year, as a part of the inner twelve, different miracles and the teachings of Christ that continued to expand after they were chosen, began to grab more and more of the multitude towards Jesus. During this time, Christ raised over two different individuals from the dead. During this time he spoke to the storm and he calmed the seas while he was in the boat with the disciples. It was during this time that he went into the area of Decapolis and he found the Gentile man who was filled with over a thousand or ten thousand demons and Jesus cast them out in one word. It was during this time that he was walking through a crowd and one woman who had an issue of blood in the middle of the crowd reached out and desiring to get healing and touched the hem of his garment and the Bible says that when she touched the hem of his garment that Jesus who was being pressed by people around him, stopped and said, "Who touched me?" And the disciples said, "What do you mean who touched you? Everyone's touching you." "No," he said, "someone touched me. I felt power go out from me." Someone touched him in faith seeking healing and there was a woman who stepped forward and confessed that she had had an issue of blood and by simply touching in faith his garment she had been healed, wonderfully healed.

Again, there were more and more miracles that began to happen in greater and greater number as more and more people flocked to Jesus to hear him and to reach him and to touch him and to receive his healing touch and it was during this first year that Christ gathered all the multitudes around and he he preached that wonderful sermon that we know of as the Sermon on the Mount where he laid out the principles and laws of his kingdom and of his rule, and the disciples were all a part of this. It was a wonderful, exciting time, and it was also during this time that Jesus took these twelve disciples and he broke them up into twos. So he made six groups and he sent them out, and Luke chapter 9 tells us that he sent them out to all the different towns and he said, "Don't worry about any provisions you have, I'll take care of your needs," and he gave them power, it said, over demons and power to cure diseases, and they were given power to preach the kingdom, and they were given power to heal the sick, and verse 6 of Luke chapter 9 tells us that the twelve went out throughout all the towns in the region preaching the Gospel and healing everywhere. You understand? Judas was a preacher of the Gospel and a healer of the sick and he experienced it with all the other twelve.

And then they returned and they were so excited about what God had done. It was a very exciting time that first year of ministry alongside of Jesus for these twelve. Things seemed to be moving so rapidly towards everything that they dreamt of. Christ seemed at any moment ready to seize the throne and establish himself as Israel's Messiah and King and to bring about political and spiritual renewal to the land. And this excitement seemed to culminate on a day almost two years, exactly two years after the beginning of Christ's earthly ministry, a very important day, a very curious day though, because although it seemed like everything culminated at this point, it became a turning point in the life of Judas. On this day, Jesus was meeting with a crowd of well over 5,000 men. The Bible only identifies how many men were present. We don't know how many women and children were present. A large crowd and the crowd was hungry and it was discovered that there was not adequate food to feed the people and so Jesus took some bread and he took some fish and he blessed the bread and he broke it and he distributed among baskets along with the fish, and he gave it to the crowd and the Bible says that all the people there ate and were filled. And then Jesus came to the twelve disciples and he gave each one of them a basket and he said to the twelve disciples, "Now I want you to go with this basket, and I want you to collect the fish and the bread that remain." And so the twelve apostles went among the crowd and gathered up what remained, and the Bible says that there were twelve baskets full of food. In other words, Christ had not only the power to feed all these people, but he had demonstrated to his twelve apostles that he was going to give them the power, the resource within himself to be used as his agents to feed others as well; their baskets, each one of their individual baskets was full of food.

And so they came back. It was an exciting day. And at the end of the day, the peaking moment of the day took place when all of the people seemed to gather and come to Jesus and it said they would make him king by force. In other words, they would allow him to become their king and they would become his army going throughout the land, instituting his rule throughout Israel, and this was an intoxicating moment for all twelve of these disciples but it became the moment that began the turning of Judas away from Christ

because the Bible says when all the people were ready to make Jesus king, everything they had hoped for, everything they seemed to see blossoming before them in this year that they spent ministering with him, seeing Christ being prepared to rule over the nation, at this moment Jesus passed up the offer and snuck away from the crowd and hid from them.

The next day the Bible says in John chapter 10, that the crowd caught up with Jesus in the town of Capernaum. First, they gathered to him and they still sought to make him king and Jesus gives a tremendous statement and we don't have time to read John chapter 10, he said to them, "You are not seeking me because you want me. You're simply seeking me because I filled your bellies, not because you believe in me for all that I truly am. I am the bread and water of life," Jesus said to them. "You must embrace all of me. If you do, you'll be saved. If you receive me and you embrace all that I am, I will give you eternal life. You must," Jesus said, "eat of me, you must drink of me, for I am the one that the Father has sent from heaven. Believe in me and I will give you eternal life and I will raise you up in the last day. Don't worry about your bellies. Don't worry about what the flesh desires. The flesh can profit you nothing. I am telling you spiritual words. I am bringing to you words that are spirit and life. Listen, eat my flesh, drink my blood, for I am all that you need. I am the bread and water of life."

It was a stunning moment for the crowd, you see. They had rushed to him. They had sought him out once he had snuck away from them. They wanted him to duplicate the food. What do people need from a king? To be cared for, to be provided for. "This is the perfect king. He'll fill our bellies. He'll give us what we need. He'll give us the financial resources that we'll need. We'll be the richest, most well cared for nation in the world and he'll be our king." And Jesus said to them, "My agenda is not to meet simply your physical needs. My primary agenda is to reorder your spiritual world. My primary agenda is to change your life, is to give you eternal life. I am the bread and water of life. I am the spiritual substance that you need in your life. I am the one that God has sent in order to grant you eternal life, not simply a temporary kingdom." It was a stunning moment, a moment of bold declaration of the faith mission of Jesus Christ. He laid out his purpose before all the people in that moment and the Bible says at that moment that their carnal appetites overruled their spiritual needs and on that day, it said, many of his disciples went back and walked with him no more. They were not willing to receive from Jesus his primary mission to be the one who will be the soul and substance of their being, be the one who would meet all that they needed. They simply wanted their bellies filled and they left him.

And as the crowds began to dwindle away from him, and if you read on to the next two years of his ministry, you'll begin to understand that for the most part, the crowds continued to dwindle away that had gathered around Jesus in that first year of ministry with his twelve disciples, and on that day, and at that moment, Jesus saw a seed of departure or of unbelief, a seed of betrayal that was beginning to be engendered in Judas. You'll read about it in John chapter 10 verse 64, "And he said to his disciples then, Will you leave me also?" And Peter spoke up, speaking on behalf of the other twelve. Peter said, "Lord, where else can we go? You have the words of life. We continue to look to

you. We'll continue to follow you." And yet, Jesus knew that not all of the twelve felt that way. And so Jesus said to him, "Not all of you believe. Have I not," he said, "chosen you twelve? But one of you is a devil." We don't know exactly what Jesus saw on that day, but what we understand is at that moment Jesus saw the pathway that Judas had begun to embark upon, that although he didn't depart with the masses on that day, at that moment his heart began to wander away towards an action that he didn't foresee, but that Jesus Christ did.

Now, there were two more years of ministry that took place after this, ministry that continued producing many miracles from Jesus Christ, a ministry where not only like the twelve had been sent out once before on a missionary journey, now Jesus takes the twelve, adds 58 more individuals to the group so that 70 individuals are broken up and they are sent out in groups, 35 groups of individuals are sent out by Jesus and they again go out and preach the Gospel and cast out demons and heal the sick in Jesus' name. This is also something Judas was a part of at this moment, but something was happening in Judas' heart. He was constantly being disappointed. Jesus came to so many points in the road where it looked as though Jesus could just take the right turn and he could walk straight up to a kingdom and he could establish himself as the one who would rule over Israel, and at every point in time in which Jesus came to these strategic points, these strategic crossroads where the right turn would lead him to a kingdom and a throne, Christ consistently went the opposite way. It was as if Christ was determined not to be the king that Judas and all the other disciples dreamt that he would be.

Maybe Judas was thinking a little bit more about this than the other disciples, and after this, Jesus began to speak about dying and about betrayals and about beatings and about persecutions for himself and for his followers, and he began to speak about his death and of his departing from them, and Judas began to think the unthinkable. "Maybe Jesus isn't able to work all of this out. Maybe he's not capable of reaching the potential that he really has that I've seen in him. Maybe things aren't as they should be." And it was at this point that Judas began to put aside some of the income that Christ had given him, saving it for a rainy day, just in case, he thought, this investment of mine with Jesus doesn't work out. Just in case this all doesn't come about, I have something to fall back upon. Judas, at this point in time, was no longer giving Jesus his all.

John chapter 12 tells us that Judas had begun to steal from the purse that he was supposed to be keeping for Jesus' ministry, and now we come, after another two years, towards the very end of Jesus' life. We're in the last two weeks of his life and he goes into Bethany for a meal six days before the Passover. And during that time, Mark 14 tells us a woman came in and anointed Jesus. John 12 tells us who the woman was, that the woman was Mary, the sister of Martha and of Lazarus. And there we read that Mary took an alabaster box or vial, and she snapped its neck off, and she poured a precious ointment, spikenard, all over Jesus, and it poured over his head, and it poured down upon his body, and she took the oil and poured it upon his feet, and she, with her hair, wiped it into his feet. Judas, the man who was good with money, began to calculate the cost of this right away and realized that this spikenard and what was poured upon Jesus was the equivalent of the wages for one year for a Jewish man and Judas protested and said, "This has been a

waste." And we read in Mark that not only did Judas protest, but it said many of the others protested. In other words, it wasn't just Judas. The other disciples thought, "Yes, Judas is right! This is inappropriate." And Judas professed with a sense of righteousness and sanctimony, "Lord, this money could have been given to the poor to take care of their needs! This is a waste!" And you know, to some extent I think Judas felt that way, he felt some sense of righteous indignation. "What a waste. We could have given so much of this to the poor and I could have pocketed a little bit for myself and what's the harm of that?" Jesus said to him, "The poor you have always with you, but me you will not always have." Another stunning statement. "She has done this to prepare me for my burial." Another stunning statement. We read that it's at this point that Judas went out and he made a deal with the chief priest that he would find a quiet place where they could turn Jesus over to them away from the crowds. The barter that Judas made was that he would do it for 30 pieces of silver, which was the price that you pay for one slave.

Now we come to the last meal of Jesus. It's the last meal, the Passover meal, and he's gathered with all his disciples and if you read the accounts from all the different four Gospels and you put them all together, what you understand is after they sat down and had an initial glass or something to drink, that Jesus rose up while they were at the supper at the table, which was called the supper, and Jesus began to wash all twelve of the disciples' feet, including Judas. He washed Judas' feet. And then he said to them, "One of you who sits at this table will betray me." And Jesus said, "Woe to that man! It would be better for him if he had never been born." And Matthew tells us in Matthew chapter 26 verses 20 through to 25, that at that time, all of the disciples began to discuss among themselves and to wonder and individually approach Jesus and say to him, "Lord, is it me? Am I the one who is going to betray you?" We don't know exactly what Jesus said to any of the other eleven, but when Judas came to Jesus and asked him, "Master, is it I?" Jesus said unto him, "You have said it." Actually, we read in John chapter 13 that at this point in time, Satan entered into Judas and what we need to understand is Satan entered into Judas, but Judas had opened the door through all these events that had taken place. And at that point, Jesus turned to Judas and said, "Whatever you're going to do, go do it quickly." And at that moment, Judas went out to collect his money and also to gather together the band of soldiers from the chief priest in order to turn Jesus over.

Judas knew a garden that Jesus frequented when he was in Jerusalem. Judas knew that it was there that Jesus would go and pray by himself and with his disciples. And so that night, Judas led the soldiers of the high priest and of the Sanhedrin to the place where Jesus would be. It's called the Garden of Gethsemane. And there he found Jesus. And as he approached the area, Judas told the soldiers, "Now listen, you wait here, and as I go closer, the one you want will be the one that I kiss." Now it was customary when you introduced yourself to a person, or you've been away for a while, and you came back in that individual's presence, and you were close friends, to give them a kiss. Now it might not be something that we think of as normal nowadays for men to do, but if you travel in Eastern countries, or you travel in the Mideast, you'll see it all the time.

So Judas approached Jesus and he approached him away from this crowd that was coming up along the hillside so it could appear as though he came from another direction.

And he came up to Jesus and as he approached Jesus, Jesus asked Judas a question. He said, "Friend, for what purpose have you come?" What an important question to ask. "Why have you come to me?" I don't think Judas entirely knew the reason why he'd come. He'd been caught up into a number of sequential things that were building up within him but at that moment, we read that Judas said, "O Master, Master." Actually, if you put the different Gospels together, it appears as though Judas said on three occasions, "Master, Master, Master." And then Matthew tells us that Judas kissed Jesus fervently. The word for kiss, the Greek word is *kataphilesin*, which has a meaning that he kissed Jesus not in the customary kiss of a greeting, but that he kissed Jesus tenderly, that it has within it the idea of a caressing, that he fell upon Jesus, "O Master, Master, Master," and began to kiss him. It would seem as though the betrayal of Judas was not such a cold and calculating thing after all, but that it was complicated by some tender affection that he still felt for Jesus. Understand this.

Now the rest of the story we know. We know at this point in time that Jesus was tried and that he was convicted and that he was condemned to die by the lies of false accusers, but Matthew chapter 27 verses 3 through 10, tells us something very interesting. There we read that when Judas saw that Jesus was condemned, that Judas was filled with remorse, and that he said something, something that's one of the more telling statements about Jesus in light of the judgment and the trial, the sham trial that he went before, that he went before the chief elders, and that he tried to turn over to them the 30 pieces of silver that he had received for betraying Christ, and he tried to give it back to them saying, "I have sinned." Isn't that interesting? Judas confessed his sin very specifically. "I have sinned against innocent blood." Or he said, "I have sinned because I have betrayed innocent blood." And there's not been a more accurate statement made of what Jesus Christ offered up on the cross than this, he offered up for the sins of the world innocent blood, and Judas was the one who understood it and described it and Judas confessed his sin, and the chief priest, when he came to them, said to him, "What's that to us? You did it. We didn't." They didn't even dispute with him whether he was innocent or not. They had got what they'd want. They'd run their sham trial and he was off now to crucifixion. "But you're the one, Judas, who's responsible," and they said that they were innocent of all this.

Well, we read at this point in time that Judas took the bag of silver, that he cast it down into the temple and that he departed and went out to a place where it says he hanged himself from a tree over a potter's field. Now, if you'll read on something else very interesting, you'll read that the chief priests took this 30 pieces of silver and they said because they wanted to be righteous and keep everything in a legal order, that it wasn't right to take blood money and use that and put it back into the coffers of the temple. So they took the money and they bought a field, a potter's field. I believe what they did was they took the money and bought the field over which Judas ultimately killed himself, the potter's field, and that's probably how they chose it. The field in which they'd buy, "Well that's where he wanted to die. Well, we'll buy the plot of land underneath his feet." But there's an interesting account that you'll find in the book of Acts. In the book of Acts, as the apostles are getting ready to choose a disciple to take the place of Judas, they identify that Judas was one of us, he was one of the twelve, and there Peter describes Judas' death

and he says that Judas fell headlong off of a height into a field and the force of the fall had caused his body to split open and his intestines to pour out upon the ground. And if you read it, you think, well, this seems to be a contradiction between the report that's given to Matthew where it says he hung himself and this grotesque description which is given in Acts, but for a moment, let me share with you this last picture of Judas' life. Judas hung himself in a fit of faithless remorse. He could see that Jesus was an innocent man, but he could not believe that Jesus was the Savior that he needed, and so without any consolation for a sin, Judas chose suicide. He took a rope and he threw it over the branch of an old tree that was standing along the banks of a hillside and there he hung himself and his body was left there because no one wished to touch that body during the Passover season and be rendered unclean so that they could not participate in the different rites and the different rituals of Passover. And so they left his body there and shortly after this occasion, Christ himself was taken up before a cross and he was hung upon a cross and he was crucified, and the Bible says that at the moment in time in which Christ died, at the hour of his death, that the earth became suddenly dark, and we can imagine a great storm swelled around the events and the wind began to blow, and Matthew tells us that the ground shook with a great quaking so much so that graves were split open, that the veil that was in the temple split down from the top to the bottom, the veil that separated the holy place from the most holy place. And at that moment in time in which Christ died and the ground began to shake, a dried old branch on an old tree gave way, and the body that was hanging from it, the swollen body of Judas, fell to the ground and landed with a gruesome effect. And this is the life and the fall and the death of Judas.

You need to understand that most of the Bible is history, and it can't be told except by telling you the story, but there is something you need to understand about the stories in God's Word, every story has a moral to it, a lesson to be learned, and the question is, what can we learn from the life of Judas? The real question is this, do we dare compare ourselves with the betrayer of Jesus Christ? And I think we ought. I think we do something wrong, we do a disservice to the story if somehow we separate all these events and say this is some anomaly in history, this doesn't happen in any other heart. No, we need to understand that the things that led Judas to this moment and to this catastrophic end was and are the things that can lead us away from Christ and cause us as well to betray him in the world we live in.

We can't have taken all this time to lay the groundwork for Judas' life and not take the time to learn some of the lessons here. The first lesson is this, starting well does not always guarantee that we shall end well. It appears at one point, Judas had left everything to follow Christ but somewhere along the way, he began to hold things back from the Lord. Somewhere along the way, he began to think that he had a better idea of how to care for the funds and the things that God had given them, that he could take care of the matters better than Christ could. "I mean, look at this terrible waste that Jesus allows by this woman. Let me handle this money here. Let me appropriate it. I'll put it aside somewhere where I can make better use of it. And I won't tell everybody everything we have because they might spend it the wrong way." And Judas began to hold things back from Christ but what really was happening in reality was that somewhere along the way,

Judas came to a point where he stopped trusting in Jesus to take care of him in the present and for the future.

You see, when you come to Jesus Christ and you give your life to him, and maybe you all can think of that moment in time, you gave your all to Jesus to follow him. You gave everything you had, along with all of your sins and all of your guilt, you gave him all of your being because they were inexorably woven within you. You gave him all of your heart because your sin had woven its tentacles into your very soul. And you had to give yourself to Jesus, he was the only one who could pull it out and extract your sin and forgive you and leave you whole and make you new. You gave all of yourself to him when you came to Christ but the question is this, does he still have your all? Does he still have your all? Or have you come to a point in time where you've decided that, "You know, he doesn't seem to be doing right by the all I've given him. He doesn't seem to be taking me down the right path. He doesn't seem to be investing the life I've given him in the proper way. I'm being wasted. I could do a lot more for you, God, in different ways. Boy, he's brought me into places where I've experienced a lot of pain and difficulty and hurts and hardships. I think I'm going to withhold from him a little bit here. I think I'm going to save a little bit of myself." As a result of withholding from God our all, we can come to the point where although we began well, we do not end well, and that's the story of Judas, a man who began well, but didn't end well, because at some point in time he stopped giving God his all and as a result, because you don't give God your all, do you know what you become? You become a thief because you're robbing from God what is rightfully his.

Now the second lesson is this, we learn from Judas that our eyes must be on Christ and not on the crowds. It seems clear in the life of Judas, according to John chapter 6 verse 64, that the day of turning, the beginning of the rising of unbelief that began to grow in Judas and ultimately led to his betrayal, was the day when all the crowds began to leave Jesus. When the people began to wander away from Christ, Peter's eyes were still fixed on Jesus Christ and he said, "Lord, who else can we have but you? Where else can we go but you?" But Judas' eyes were giving a backward glance to those who were departing, and he began to wonder if maybe the crowd was right. Folks, listen to me: the crowd is never right. Right and truth in our lives is never discovered by the acquiescence or vote of the crowd. Right and truth is discovered only when the individual meets the Savior. The question, the real question of importance that we must ask is not who do the people say Jesus is, what are the people doing with Jesus Christ, it's who do I say that he is and what am I doing with his life and his person? Judas made the mistake of somehow investing too much or believing too much in the integrity of the multitudes instead of believing in the integrity of the Messiah. He turned his eyes to the crowd instead of keeping his eyes fixed upon the Christ.

Now the third lesson is a lesson that we learn in the betrayal of Jesus Christ, and the question that we must ask in order to learn this lesson is simply ask this question, why did Judas betray Jesus? I don't think we'll ever totally know this thing. It's a complicated question to ask and people are complicated people. And obviously Judas was a very complicated individual. There are basically two suggestions that are given for why Judas

betrayed Christ. One of them is this, we are told that Judas betrayed Christ because he was disillusioned by Christ's failure to take action to make himself king. That's what we are learning. He was disillusioned that Christ was not doing what he thought Christ ought to do. Some have suggested that Judas decided that it wasn't going to turn out as he hoped and so he sought to salvage the situation and make the best of his disappointment and therefore betray him. Others have suggested that Judas still believed that Jesus Christ was the Messiah, but he was attempting by this betrayal to force Christ's hand in order that Christ would reveal himself and declare himself to be as the King. And so what Judas was trying to do was put Jesus in a situation, in a circumstance where he would make it known that he was King and he would have to stand forward and take the right step and Judas was actually doing God a favor here and working it out. One says he was trying to make the best of a bad situation that he knew was going to get worse. The other said the situation isn't going the way it ought to go, it looks like it's getting worse, I'm going to make it better. He didn't like the way God was working things out and so he did what he did. That's basically the reason given. And maybe, maybe it's a little bit of both. Maybe what Judas thought was, "I'm going to be the wise guy here. I'm going to play the right hand here. Look, this is what's going to happen. I'm at least going to be the guy who puts the chain of events into motion that makes him reveal himself. Either way, I'll play the wise hand while the rest of these disciples don't know what to do. I'm the one who really is the smart one in a bunch."

So this is one of the reasons given for why Judas might have betrayed Jesus, but the second reason is this, John tells us that Judas loved money, that basically he protested the wasted anointing of Jesus by Mary with religious and moral statements but all these religious and moral statements, all this could have been given to the poor, was masking a larcenous, thieving heart and that's why he betrayed Jesus. Basically, simply because Judas was just a thief. That's all. That's the simple version.

Well, here's the question we have to ask. The question is this, are we like Judas? Are we like Judas? Could we have ever departed from our faith and faithful servant of Christ because we don't think that God is taking us in the right direction? Have we ever become impatient with God and sought to force his hand? "Lord, I don't like the place you put me in. I don't like this relationship. I don't like this position. I don't like this obligation I'm under. I'm going to take measures in my own hand and see what I can make of my situation. I can't wait any longer for you to work things through. I'll take this in my own hand. I'll break off this relationship. I'll make this purchase. I'll take this position. I'll ignore your word or your counsel or your Spirit's leading. I'll marry him or her even though she's not a believer. I'll compromise with my convictions about what I have to do in this matter here. I'll take a shortcut to reach this objective. God, you're just not working things out the way you should." Folks, I can't give you any specifics, but I suppose that all of us can fall or have fallen where Judas fell, that we get tired of waiting on God and decide to act on our own and we get out ahead of God and we tell ourselves that we're doing it for him, but we can't be doing it for him when we're doing it without him and when we're doing it against express commands and his warnings.

Are we like Judas? He protested with religious sanctimony, the service of Mary, the sister of Lazarus when she anointed Jesus' feet, but John said this he did not because he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and at that moment, no one suspected that Judas' motives were impure. In fact, the rest of the disciples, "Yeah, yeah, that's not right! That was a waste!" He looked the part of one who had the true concern, maybe even looked the part to himself. He used religion as a cloak to gain something for himself.

Are we like Judas? There are conditions in our own hearts that we can hardly identify. Listen to this, conditions that color our judgments. We love the praise and honor of men. We love comfort. We love ease. We love to be well thought of, even when we know we are sinning and breaking God's will for our lives. We can speak with an almost holy zeal in defense of an attitude or action that we're engaged in. We will champion and cause or initiate with moral bombast, and all the while be hiding behind our bombast a thieving heart. We will loudly point to criticize the failure of someone there or there or there and attempt to hide and distract people from the attention that is here and here and here in our hands and our hearts and our minds because they're not right with God. We have all of us a flesh that loves power, that loves influence, that loves praise. A man can pray and act holy and chaste and even humble, but all the while he can do it because he knows that this behavior will gain for him a coveted identity as a righteous person, and then under this identity, he cloaks and hides ongoing acts of disobedience from others and even from himself.

He steals from God his all and pretends to be giving his all to him but when we act this way, we act no differently than Judas. We are almost Judas. No, we say we're not like Judas. We're not cold and calculating like him. Yes, we sin. Yes, we hold back from God at times, and we don't let people know it, and we pretend to be holy and good, but we love Jesus, and we have an affection for him, and we call him Master, O Master, and we kiss him tenderly. Do you see? We may betray our Lord even with tender affection and kisses, even when we feel we still love him, because emotions aren't enough. Actions tell the whole of love. Actions do. Listen to Judas. Judas awoke to his sin. He realized what he had done. He confessed his sin. He said, "I have sinned against and betrayed innocent blood." He was filled with remorse. He threw back the gains that he had gained because of his rejection and because of his petty thievery. He threw back all the advantages he had once thought in betraying Christ. Let me ask you something, have you gone as far as Judas? Have you recognized the acts, the petty acts of larceny and betrayal in your own life? You say, "Come on, Joel, not me. Look, let's not go this far. I'm not like Judas. I'm not a betrayer." And my question is this, are you more circumspect than the other eleven disciples? You remember what Jesus said, "One of you among me is the betrayer"? They didn't say, "Must be Judas." They said, "Lord, is it me?" They talked among themselves, it said, and discussed it. They said, "Well, you know, maybe, could I have done this? Could I be the one? You know, I have felt this way, and I have thought this way." And the eleven thought, "It could be me." And Judas knew it. At some point, Judas said, "It's me. I have betrayed. I have offended innocent blood."

I think it's important here, folks, I think it's important that we go this far with Judas. First, we have to be willing to identify ourselves with him. Second, we have to be going as far

as Judas went, we have to confess that we betray Christ, that we pretend to be righteous and holy, and we put on religious airs all the while we know we're stealing from God. We know he's put his finger in the area of our life and we've not given it to him at times. We know we're seeking to force his hand and go our own way. Judas saw his sin against Christ, but he did not see Christ as a Savior and so Judas embraced his own judgment against himself, and he threw himself into suicide when he could have thrown himself in the arms of the Savior. Judas' final act of betrayal was not against the Lord, it was a betrayal against himself because he confessed but he would not cast himself on Jesus. He would not believe that the innocent blood of Jesus could make him clean. He remembered all the woes that Christ pronounced against his sin, but he forgot all the "comes" that Jesus offered to the sinner. Remember Jesus said, "Whoever comes to me, I will in no wise cast out." And Jesus said to Judas this truth but Judas would not believe it. Jesus said, "I am the bread and water of life. Judas, eat of me, drink of me." But Judas would not partake of him for his life. And this is where our comparison with Judas needs to end. Let's go this far with Judas, but then let's stop. Let's have it in here. Let faith take the place now. Let faith take us in another direction. Let faith bring us to the end of the comparison. Let faith help us see our sins, but then let faith guide us to see our Savior with arms open wide. Faith confesses sin, but then faith embraces the Savior. Faith takes cleansing, faith takes washing, faith takes new life from Jesus, so that we who were almost Judas can be all of Jesus Christ.

Let's pray.

Our heavenly Father, we want to be honest before you and real before you. We want our faith to be the faith that is filled with the substance of blood and sinew and life. We want it to be filled with the grit of reality, not the airbrushing of our fantasies. God, we want to not alienate ourselves from your strongest words to us but we even, too, want to receive these words, not that we ought to be destroyed but that we would come to an end of ourselves, that we might turn back again to give you our all. Lord, if it's not the case today, may we remember that this is our propensity, this is the direction and nature of all flesh, not only Judas' but ours, to wander in faithlessness away from you. And God, may we confess our sins, come weeping and wandering back into your arms. Lord, if there's someone here who has been withholding from you all of their lives, who has been negotiating their future with you, negotiating their next step with you, and has not given a complete abandonment of themselves, if they've taken back what they've given to you, God, this morning, may they say, "I have offended innocent blood." May they turn back to you their all. May they confess their sins. May they cast themselves into your arms and find all of your cleansing. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.