

Judas Iscariot: A Study in Character

by Joseph Parker

The sermon explores the character of Judas Iscariot as a reflection of human nature, emphasizing the potential for betrayal and the importance of self-examination in the Christian life.

Scripture: Matthew 12:32, Matthew 26:14, Matthew 26:24, Matthew 27:3, John 6:70, John 12:6, John 17:12, John 18:8, Acts 1:25

Topics: "Biblical Betrayal", "Spiritual Leadership"

Description

Joseph Parker preaches about the character of Judas Iscariot, challenging the congregation to reflect on the possibility of harboring monstrous and vile traits within themselves. He delves into the complexity of Judas' nature, emphasizing that even the most intellectual and influential individuals can fall into betrayal. Parker urges self-reflection, warning against the dangers of intellectual sagacity without spiritual grounding, highlighting the importance of humility, prayer, and closeness to God in leadership roles within the church.

Transcript

Jesus answered them, "Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?" -- John 6:70

IT WILL HELP ME very greatly in my delicate work of examining the character of the betrayer of our Lord if there be an understanding between us that it is not presumptuously supposed on either side that every difficulty can be explained, and that perfect unanimity can be secured on every point; and especially if it be further understood that my object is not to set up or defend any theory about Judas Iscariot, but solemnly to inquire whether his character was so absolutely unlike everything we know of human nature as to give us no help in the deeper understanding of our own; or whether there was not even in Judas something that, at its very worst, was only an exaggeration of elements or forces that may possibly be in everyone of us.

We always think of him as a monster; but what if we ourselves be-at least in possibility-as monstrous and as vile? Let us go carefully through his history, and see. My purpose is to cut a path as straight as I may be able to go, through the entangled and thorny jungle of texts which make up the history of Iscariot; I propose to stop here and there on the road, that we may get new views and breathe perhaps an uncongenial air; and though we may differ somewhat as to the distance and form of passing objects, I am quite sure that when we get out again into the common highways we shall resume our unanimity, and find

it nonetheless entire and cordial because of what we have seen on the unaccustomed and perilous way. First of all, then, let us try to get a clear knowledge of the character of Judas Iscariot, the disciple, and apostle, and betrayer, of the Son of God.

Expository

"Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?" (John 6:70). Who, then, will say that the men with whom Christ began His new kingdom were more than men-not bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, but a princely sort, specially created and quite away from the common herd in sympathy and aim? He chose twelve men who fairly represented human nature in its best and worst aspects-they represented gentleness, ardor, domesticity, enterprise, timidity, courage-and one of them was a devil. Not a devil in the sense of being something else than human. Judas was a man like the others, but in him there was a preeminent capacity for plotting and attempting the foulest mischief

We are certainly not to understand that our Lord chose twelve men who, with one exception, were converted, intelligent, sanctified, and perfect; nor is it by any means certain that our Lord chose even the most intellectual and influential men that it was possible for Him to draw into His service. I do not know that we are entitled to regard the Apostles as in all respects the twelve best men of their day; but I think we may justly look upon them as an almost complete representation of all sides of human nature. And as such they utterly destroy the theory that they were but a coterie-men of one mean stamp, without individuality, force, emphasis, or self-assertion; padding, not men; mere shadows of a crafty empiric, and not to be counted as men.

On the contrary, this was a representative discipleship; we were all in that elect band; the kingdom of God, as declared in Christ Jesus, would work upon each according to his own nature, and would reveal every man to himself. A very wonderful and instructive thing is this, that Jesus Christ did not point out the supremely wicked man, but merely said, "One of you is a devil." Thus a spirit of self-suspicion was excited in the whole number, culminating in the mournful "Is it I?" of the Last Supper: and truly it is better for us not to know which is the worst man in the church-to know only that judgment will begin at the house of God, and to be wondering whether that judgment will take most effect upon ourselves.

No man fully knows himself Jesus Christ would seem to be saying to us-At this moment you appear to be a child of God: you are reverent, charitable, well-disposed; you have a place in My visible kingdom-even a prominent place in the pulpit, on the platform, at the desk, in the office; appearances are wholly and strongly in your favor, yet, little as you suspect it, deep under all these things lies an undiscovered self-a very devil, it may be; so that even you, now loud in your loyalty and zealous beyond all others in pompous diligence, may in the long run turn around upon your Lord and thrust a spear into His heart!

Can it be that the foremost sometimes stumble? Do the strong cedars fall? May the very star of the morning drop from the gate of heaven? Let the veteran, the leader, the hoary Nestor, the soldier valiant beyond all others, say, "Lord, is it I?" Which of us can positively separate himself from Judas Iscariot and honestly say-His was a kind of human nature different from mine? I dare not do so. In the betrayer I would have every man see a possibility of himself-it may be, magnified in hideous and revolting exaggeration, yet part of the same earth heaved, in the case of Judas, into a great hill by fierce heat, but on exactly the same plane as the coldest dust that lies miles below its elevation. Iscariot's was a human sin rather than a merely personal crime. Individually I did not sin in Eden, but humanly I did; personally I did not covenant for the betrayal of my Lord, but morally I did-I denied Him, and betrayed Him, and spat

upon Him, and pierced Him; and He loved me and gave Himself for me!

Of course the question will arise, Why did our Lord choose a man whom He knew to be a devil? A hard question; but there is a harder still--Why did Jesus choose you? Could you ever make out that mystery? Was it because of your respectability? Was it because of the desirableness of your companionship? Was it because of the utter absence of all devilishness in your nature? What if Judas did for you what you were only too timid to do for yourself? The Incarnation with a view to human redemption, is the supreme mystery; in comparison with that, every other difficulty is as a molehill to a mountain. In your heart of hearts are you saying, "If this man were a prophet, he would know what manner of man this Judas is, for he is a sinner"? O self-contented Simon, presently the Lord will have somewhat to say to you, and His parable will smite you like a sword.

"The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed!" (Matt. 26:24). I think we shall miss the true meaning and pathos of this passage if we regard it merely as the exclamation of a man who was worsted for the moment by superior strength, but who would get the upper hand by-and-by, and then avenge his humiliation. These words might have been uttered with tears of the heart--Woe will be the portion of that man who betrays me; yes, woe upon woe, even to remorse and agony and death; the chief of sinners, he will also be chief of sufferers; when he sees the full meaning of what he has done, he will sink under the intolerable shame, he will give blood for blood, and be glad to find solace in death.

And if our hearts be moved at all to pitifulness in the review of this case, may we not find somewhat of a redeeming feature in the capacity for suffering so deep and terrible? Shall we be stretching the law of mercy unduly if we see in this self-torment a faint light on the skirts of an appalling cloud? I do not find that Judas professed or manifested any joy in his grim labor; there is no sound of revel or mad hilarity in all the tragic movement; on the contrary, there is a significant absence, so far as we can judge from the narrative, of all the excitement needful for nerving the mischievous man to work out purposes which he knows to be wholly evil. Ah the while, Judas would seem to be under a cloud, to be advancing stealthily rather than boisterously; he was no excited Belshazzar whose brain was aflame with excess of wine--though he, too, trembled as if the mystic hand were writing letters of doom upon the old familiar scenes: so excited is he that a word will send him reeling backward to the ground, and if he do not his work "quickly" he will become sick with fear and be incapable of action; as it is, he has only bargained to "kiss" the Victim, not to clutch Him with a ruffian's grasp. Then came the intolerable woe!

This great law is at work upon our lives today. Woe to the unfaithful pastor; woe to the negligent steward; woe to the betrayer of sacred interests; woe to them that call evil good and good evil--to all such be woe; not only the woe of outward judgment--divine and inexorable--but that, if may be, still keener, sadder woe of self-contempt and self-damnation. With such sorrow no stranger may intermeddle. The lesson to ourselves would seem to be this--Do not regard divine judgment merely as measure for measure in relation to your sin--that is to say, so much penalty for so much guilt. It is more than that--it is a quickening of the man into holy resentment against himself, an arming of the conscience against the whole life, a subjective controversy which will not be lulled into unrighteous peace, but will rage wrathfully and implacably until there shall come repentance to life or remorse to death.

Shall I startle you if I say that there is a still more terrible state than that of such anguish as Iscariot's? To have worn out the moral sense, to have become incapable of pain, to have the conscience seared as with a hot iron, to be "Past feeling"--that is the consummation of wickedness. That there is a judicial and

outward infliction of pain on account of sin, is of course undoubted; but while that outward judgment may actually harden the sinner, the bitter woe which comes of a true estimate of sin and of genuine contrition for its enormity may work out a repentance not to be repented of. If, then, any man is suffering the pain of just self-condemnation on account of sin; if any man's conscience is now rising mightily against him and threatening to tear him in pieces before the Lord, because of secret lapses or unholy betrayals, because of long-sustained hypocrisy or self-seeking faithlessness, I will not hurriedly seek to ease the healthy pain; the fire will work to his purification, and the Refiner will lose nothing of the gold. But if any man, how eminent soever in ecclesiastical position, knows that he has betrayed the Lord, and conceals under a fair exterior all that Ezekiel saw in the chamber of imagery, and is as a brazen wall against every appeal-hard, tearless, impenetrable, unresponsive-I do not hesitate to say that I would rather be numbered with Judas than with that man.

"It had been good for that man if he had not been born" (Matt. 26:24). Then why was he born? is the question, not of impatient ignorance only, but of a certain moral instinct which God never fails to respect throughout the whole of His relationship with mankind, and which He will undoubtedly honor in this instance. Take the case as it is ordinarily put: Judas, like the rest of us, had no control over his own birth; he found himself in a world in whose formation he had no share; he was born under circumstances which, as to their literal and local bearing, can never be repeated in all the ages of time.

So far as we can gather from the narrative, Jesus spoke to him no word of sympathy, never drew him aside, as He drew Peter, to tell him of preventing prayer, but to all appearance left him to be the blind and helpless instrument of the devil, and then said, "It had been good for that man if he had not been born." This cannot be the full meaning of the words. Instantly we repeat the profound inquiry of Abram, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" He may, and must, transcend our understanding; He will, by the very nature of the case, dazzle and confound our imagination by the unsuspected riches and glory of His many mansions; but He must not trouble our sense of right if He would retain our homage and our love.

Personally, I can have no share in the piety that can see any man condemned under such circumstances as have just been described; it is not enough to tell me that it is some other man and not myself who suffers-a suggestion ineffably mean even if it were true; but it is not true; I do suffer: a tremendous strain is put upon my sensibilities, and I cannot, without anguish, see any man arbitrarily driven into hell. Upon his face, writhing in unutterable torture, is written this appeal, "Can you see me, bone of your bone and flesh of your flesh, thus treated, weighed down, crushed, damned, by a power I am utterly unable either to placate or resist!" That man may be my own father, my own child, my most familiar friend; and though he be a stranger, of name unknown, he has at all events the claim of our common humanity upon me. I have purposely put the case in this strong way, that I may say with the more emphasis that I see no such method of government revealed in the narrative now under consideration. If I saw anything like it in any part of the Word of God, I should say, "My understanding is at fault, not God's justice; from what I know of His method within the scope of my own life, I know and am sure that righteousness and judgment are the habitation of His throne, and that His mercy endureth forever." I see things that are mysterious, incomprehensible, baffling; I come upon Scriptures which utterly defy all scholars and interpreters; but this is the confidence that I have--"the Judge of all the earth will do right."

As to the particular expression in the text, two things may be said:

First, it is well known that the Jews were in the habit of saying, "It had been good for that man had he not been born,"--it was a common expression of the day, in speaking of transgressors, and did not by any

means imply a belief in the final destruction or damnation of the person spoken of.

Secondly, this passage has again and again exactly expressed our own feeling in many crises of our own life: it must be forever true that non-existence is better than sinfulness. When he was on our lips, when part of the price was laid down as the whole, when we dishonored the vow we made in secret with God, when we rolled iniquity under our tongue as a sweet morsel-at that time it had been good for us if we had not been born.

Such, indeed, is the only form of words equal to the gravity of the occasion; better we say, again and again, not to have been born than to have done this; if this be the end of our being, then has our life been a great failure and a mortal pain. I hold that these words were spoken not so much of Judas the man as of Judas the sinner, and that consequently they apply to all evil-doers throughout all generations, and are in reality the most tender and pathetic admonition which even Christ could address to the slaves of sin.

We may get some light upon this expression by considering the fact that "it repented the Lord that He had made man." In studying all such passages we must have regard to the order of time. St. Paul said, "If in this life only we have hope, we are of all men most miserable." So, if we break off our own life at certain points, we shall say the same thing of ourselves; and if we interrupt human history, so that one fact shall not be allowed to explain another, it would be easy to find sections which would prove alike the disorder and malignity of the Divine government.

We know what this means in some of the works of our own hands. Thus, for example: You undertook to build a house for the Lord, and your heart was full of joy as you saw the sacred walls rising in your hopeful dreams; but when you came to work out your purpose, you came upon difficulty after difficulty-promises were broken, contracts were trifled with, the very stars in their courses seemed to fight against you, and at length, after many disappointments and exasperations, you said, "It repents me; it gives me pain, it grieves me, that I began this house." Such is the exact state of your feeling at that particular moment. But other influences were brought to bear upon the situation, resources equal to the difficulty were developed, and when the roof covered the walls, and the spire shot up into the clouds, you forget your pains and tears in a great satisfaction. You will say that God foresaw all the difficulty of building the living temple of manhood, that the whole case was clearly before Him from eternity; that is, of course, true; but the pain of ingratitude is nonetheless keen because the ingratitude itself was foreknown.

Take the case of Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh, as an illustration. He foresaw all the triumphs of His cross-all heaven thronged with innumerable multitudes out of every kindred and people and tongue-yet He prayed that the cup might pass from Him, and He needed an angel to help Him in the time of His soul's sorrow. In magnifying God's omniscience we must not overlook God's love; nothing, indeed, could surprise His foreknowledge, yet it grieved Him at the heart that He had made man; and He called upon the heavens to hear and upon the earth to be astonished, because His children had rebelled against Him!

"This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief and had the bag, and bare what was put therein" (John 12:6). It is more to the credit of the apostles themselves that this should be regarded as an afterthought than as an undoubted conviction, or an established fact, at the time that Judas sat with them at the Paschal Supper, or even at the time that he asked why the ointment was not sold for the benefit of the poor. This is more evident from the fact that the writer indicates Judas as the betrayer, whereas at the moment of the test his identity was not established. There is no mystery about

the insertion of this explanatory suggestion, for we all know how easy it is after a character has fully revealed itself to go back upon its separate acts and account for them by their proper motives-motives unknown at the time of the action, but plainly proved by subsequent revelations of character. This was probably the case in the instance before us: else why did the disciples allow Judas to keep the bag? Why did they not humble and exhaust him by an incessant protest against his dishonesty? And why did not our Lord, instead of mildly expostulating, say to Judas as He once said to Peter, "Get thee behind me, Satan"?

Here, then, is a great law within whose operation we ourselves may be brought-the law of reading the part in the light of the whole, and of judging the isolated act by the standard of the complete character. Illustrations of the working of this law will occur to you instantly. Let a man eventually reveal himself as having unworthily filled prominent positions in the church-let his character be proved to have been corrupt, and then see what light is thrown upon words and deeds which at the time were not fully understood. How abundant then will be such expressions-these in recounting his utterances:

"He advised prudence and care and very great caution in working out church plans; he counseled concentration; he deprecated romantic schemes: this he did (as we now can see), not that he was a lover of Prudence or a worshiper of Wisdom, but because he was a thief, and he feared that bold and noble schemes would shame him into reluctant generosity."

"He urged that the church should be built with the least possible decoration or ornament; he spoke strongly against colored glass and elaborate enrichment: and this he did (as we can now see), not that he was devoted to Simplicity or absorbed in spiritual aspiration, but because he was a thief, and feared that every block of polished marble would increase the sum which his respectability would be expected to subscribe."

"He denounced all heretical tendencies in the Christian ministry; he knew heterodoxy afar off; he never ceased to declare himself in favor of what he supposed to be the Puritan theology: and this he did, not that in his heart of hearts he cared for the conservation of orthodoxy, but because he was a thief, and had a felonious intent upon the reputation of independent thinkers whose shoelaces he was not worthy to unloose."

All this comes out after a man has revealed himself as Judas did. But let me also say that the "thief" may be dictating our speech even when we least suspect it, certainly where there may never be such a disclosure as there was in the case of Judas. There are conditions under which we hardly know what influence it is that colors our judgment and suggests our course-may it not be the "thief" that underlies our consciousness, and so cunningly touches our life as never to excite our suspicion or our fear? We know how subtle are the workings of self-deception, and perhaps even the godliest of us would be surprised to know exactly the inspiration of some of our most fervent speeches-surprised to find that though the outward orator seemed to be an earnest man, the inner and invisible speaker is the "thief" that prompted Judas! Who, then, can stand before the Lord, or be easy in the presence of His holy law? It is under such inquiries that the strongest man quails, and that the swiftest of Gods messengers humbly prays, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord; for in thy sight shall no flesh living be justified."

"Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, And said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you?" (Matt. 26:14-15). Why should there have been any bargaining, or why should there have been any difficulty about the arrest of Christ? We must look to an earlier verse for the solution. The chief priests, the scribes, and the elders, had met for consultation in the

palace of the high priest, Caiaphas, and the principal question was, not how they might take Jesus, but how they might take Him by subtilty, by craft, deceit, guile, as if they would have secretly murdered Him if they could-murdered Him in the darkness, and in the morning have wiped their mouths as innocent men! Judas would appear to have gone to them secretly, and offered himself as one who knew the haunts and times and methods of Christ; and in doing so he showed the weak and vicious side of his nature, his covetousness, his greed, his love of money-and herein his guilt seems to culminate in an aggravation infernal and unpardonable.

But are we ourselves verily clear in this matter? Are we not every day selling Christ to the highest bidder? When we stifle our convictions lest we should lose a morsel of bread; when we are dumb in the presence of the enemy lest our words should be followed by loss of domestic comfort or personal honor; when we soften our speech, or hide the Cross, or join in ungodly laughter that we may avoid an ungodly sneer, we are doing in our own way the very thing which we rightly condemn in the character of Judas.

"Then Judas which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood: ... And he cast down the silver pieces in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself" (Matt. 27:3-5). Is there not a tone in these words with which we are familiar? Is there not, indeed, something of our own voice in this mournful story? Let us look at it carefully:

"When he saw"--that, at least, is familiar! Not until our actions are set a little off do we see all their relations and all their meaning; in their progress we are too near them to get their full effect; if we take but one step back we shall be affrighted by the very actions of which the doing gave us a kind of frenzied joy. We make our own ghosts. We shut the eyes of our minds while we are doing certain things; and when the last touch is given to the deed, we are taught by the bitterness of experience that Temptation destroys our sight and that Guilt restores it. Recall the case of Adam and Eve--"And the eyes of them both were opened"! Very short and cloudy is the sight of the body: how keen, how piercing, is the sight of a self-convicted soul! Before that discerning vision the air is full of eyes, and the clearest of all days is dark with menaces and gathering thunders.

"When he saw that he was condemned." At that moment the surprise of Judas himself was supreme and unutterable: evidently he did not expect that this catastrophe would supervene. He may, indeed, have said to himself-as a man of inventive and daring mind would be likely to say-I am quite sure, from what I have seen of His miracles, that He will prove Himself more than a match for all His enemies; He has done so before, and He will do it again. They said they would cast Him down from the brow of the hill, but He went through the midst of them like a beam of light, and when they took up stones to stone Him, their hands were held fast by that strong will of His. He has provoked them to their face, heaped up all their sins before them, taunted and goaded them to madness, and yet He held them in check and played with them as He listed; it will be so again. Besides, He may just want a plan like mine to bring things to a point; I will put Him into the hands of these men, then will He shake them off, proclaim His kingdom, drive away the spoiler from the land of the Hebrews, and we shall come into the enjoyment of our promised reward. Judas may not have used these words, but in effect they are being used by sinners every day! This is the universal tongue of self-deception, varying a little, it may be, in the accent, but in substance the same all the world over; a putting of one thing against another, a balancing of probabilities, an exercise of self-outwitting cunning; a secret hope that something can be snatched out of the fire, and that the flames can be subdued without undue damage this is the method of sinfulness of heart, a method confounded every day by the hand of God, yet every day coming up again to fresh attempts and renewed humiliations.

"When he saw that he was condemned he repented himself." Is there not hope of a man who is capable of any degree of repentance, even when repentance takes upon itself the darker shade of horror and remorse? I know what the word is which is translated "repented," and I remember with joy that it is the word which is used of the sin who said he would not go, and afterward repented and went; it is the word which Paul used of himself on one occasion in writing to the Corinthians. But even if the word be rendered "was filled with remorse and shame and despair," I should say, "So much the better for Judas." Under such circumstances I should have more hope of a man who had absolutely no hope of himself, than of a man who could sufficiently control himself to think that even such a sin-infinite in wickedness as it must have appeared to his own mind---could ever be forgiven. It is easy for us who never experienced the agony to say what Judas ought to have done: how he ought to have wept and prayed and sought forgiveness as we now should seek it-we cannot intermeddle with his sorrow, nor ought we harshly to judge the method of his vengeance.

"I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood." Not, "I was hurried into this by others"; not, "Others are as much to blame as I am"; but, "I did it, and I alone." Not, "I have made a mistake"; not, "This is a great error on my part"; but, "I have sinned"-the very word which he might have heard in his Lord's parable of the Prodigal Son-the word which our Father in heaven delights to hear! "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, for His mercy endureth forever." "If thy brother turn again, saying, I repent, forgive him"-Judas repented himself "How often shall I forgive him. Seven times. Seventy times seven"! And shall I forgive him the less because his repentance has deepened into remorse, and he has lost all hope of himself? Surely the more on that very account. And if he slay himself because of his sin against me? Then must I think of him with still more tender pity, nor cloud his memory with a single suspicion.

And here let me say, as to the spiritual application of this matter, I have no faith in the moral value of fine-drawn distinctions between repentance and despair; my belief is that until we reach the point of self-despair as to our sin against Christ, we can never know the true meaning or realize the true joy of repentance. That Judas should have slain himself with his own hand is, in my view of the case, wholly in his favor. It must have appeared to him, indeed, to be the only course open to him; floods of tears he could never set against the blood of an innocent man; to cry and moan and weep bitterly, would be just to aggravate the appalling crime. With a stronger light beating on our life than ever Judas was permitted to enjoy, guarded by all the restraints of Christian civilization, living under the ministry of the Holy Spirit, we are by so much unable to sympathize with the intolerable horror which destroyed the self-control of the Betrayer of our Lord.

So far as I can think myself back into the mental condition of Judas, his suicide seems to me to be the proper completion of his insufferable self-reproach. And yet that self-control was preserved long enough to enable Judas Iscariot to utter the most effective and precious eulogy ever pronounced upon the character of Jesus Christ. How brief, how simple, how complete-"innocent blood"! If the proper interpretation of words is to be found, as it undoubtedly is, in circumstances, then these two words are fuller in meaning and more tender in pathos than the most labored encomium could possibly be. Consider the life which preceded these words, and you will see that they may be amplified thus: "I know Jesus better than any of you can know Him; you have only seen Him in public, I have lived with Him in private. I have watched His words as words of man were never watched before. I have heard His speeches meant for His disciples alone. I have seen Him in poverty, weariness, and pain of heart; I have heard His prayers at home. I trusted that it had been He who would have redeemed Israel from patriotic servility. I curse myself, I

exonerate Him-His is innocent blood!"

How glad would the Jews have been if Christ had been witnessed against by one of His own disciples! They would have welcomed his evidence; no gold could have adequately paid for testimony so direct and important; and Judas loved gold. Yet the holy truth came uppermost; Judas died not with a he in his right hand, but with the word of truth upon his lips, and the name of Christ was thus saved from what might have been its deepest wound.

"Those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition" (John 17:12). At the first glance these words would seem to put the fate of Judas Iscariot beyond all controversy, yet further consideration may show how mercy may magnify itself even in this cloud. Judas is called "the son of perdition"; true, and Peter himself was called Satan by the same Lord. And if Judas was "the son of perdition," what does Paid say of all mankind? Does he not say, "We are by nature the children of wrath, even as others"? But in this case "the son of perdition" is said to be "lost"; but does the word lost necessarily imply that he was in hell? "We have all erred and strayed like lost sheep"; "the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost"; and, "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth [Judas repented himself], more than over ninety and nine just persons that need no repentance." It is our joy to believe that wherever repentance is possible, mercy is possible; and it is heaven to us to know that where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. And are we quite sure that there is no ray of hope falling upon the repentant and remorseful Judas from such words as these: "And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which He hath given me [and that He gave him Iscariot is clear from the very passage we are now considering] I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day" (John 6:39)? But there is still more light to be thrown on this great gloom. Take this passage (John 18:8-9): "Jesus answered, I have told you that I am he if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way; that the saying might be fulfilled which he spake, Of them which thou gavest me I have lost none."

Now suppose that the ruffians had answered, "No, we will not let these go their way; we will slay them with the sword at once"--would it follow that Jesus Christ had lost His disciples in the sense of their having been destroyed in unquenchable fire? The suggestion is not to be entertained for a moment, yet this is the very "saying" which is supposed to determine the damnation of Judas! As I read the whole history, I cannot but feel that our Lord was especially wistful that His disciples should continue with Him throughout His temptation, should watch with Him, that in some way, hardly to be expressed in words, they should help Him by the sympathy of their presence-in this sense He was anxious to "lose none"; but He did lose the one into whom Satan had entered, and He refers to him not so much for His own sake as that He may rejoice the more in the constancy of those who remained. But the whole reference, as it seems to me, is not to the final and eternal state of men in the unseen world, but to continuance and steadfastness in relation to a given crisis.

"This ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place" (Acts 1:25). One reputable scholar has suggested that the words "go to his own place" may refer to Matthias, and not to Judas; but the suggestion does not commend itself to my judgment. I think we should lose a good deal by accepting this interpretation. I hold that this is an instance of exquisite delicacy on the part of Peter: no judgment is pronounced; the fall is spoken of only as official and as involving official results, and the sinner himself is left in the hands of God. It is in this spirit that Peter speaks of Judas:

Owning his weakness,

His evil behavior,

And leaving with meekness

His sins to his Savior.

Practical

Such a study as this can hardly fail to be fruitful of suggestion to the nominal followers of Christ in all ages. What are its lessons to ourselves-to ourselves as Christians, ministers, office-bearers, and stewards of heavenly mysteries?

1. Our first lesson will be found in the fact that when our Lord said to His disciples, "One of you shall betray me", every one of them began to say, "Is it I?" Instead of being shocked even to indignation, each of the disciples put it to himself as a possibility; "it may be I; Lord, is it I?" This is the right spirit in which to hold all our privileges. We should regard it as a possibility that the strongest may fall, and even the oldest may betray His trust. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

Do you suppose that there was but one betrayal of the Lord once for all, and that the infamous crime can never be repeated? "I tell you, nay"! There are predictions yet to be realized--"There shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them";--"Lord, is it I? It shall surely be more tolerable for Judas Iscariot in the day of judgment than for that man! living in the light of. gospel day; professing to have received the Holy Spirit; ordained as a minister of the Cross; holding office in the Christian church--"it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good Word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again to repentance; seeing that they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame." "Lord, is it I?"

"In the last days perilous times shall come; men shall be traitors"--"Lord, is it I?" Governing our life by this self-misgiving spirit, not thinking all men sinful but ourselves, we shall be saved from the boastfulness which is practical blasphemy, and our energy shall be kept from fanaticism by the chastening influence of self-doubt. Looking upon all the mighty men who have made shipwreck of faith and a good conscience-Adam, Saul, Solomon, Judas-let us be careful lest after having preached to others we ourselves should be cast away.

It is true that we cannot repeat the literal crime of Judas, but there are greater enormities than his! We can outdo Judas in sin! "Whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man it shall be forgiven him, but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Spirit it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in the world to come" (Matt. 12:32). We cannot sell the body, but we can grieve the Spirit! There can be no more covarianting over the Lord's bones, but we can plunge a keener spear into His heart than that which drew forth blood and water from His side; we cannot nail Him to the accursed tree, but we can pierce Him through with many sorrows.

Judas died by the vengeance of his own hand; of how much sorer punishment, suppose, shall he be thought worthy, who has done despite to the Spirit of Grace? Judas shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it, because when he saw the error of his ways he repented himself, and made restitution of his unholy gains; but we have rolled iniquity under our tongue as a sweet morsel, we

have held our places in the sanctuary while our heart has been the habitation of the enemy! It will be a fatal error on our part if we suppose that human iniquity reached its culmination in the sin of Judas, and that after his wickedness all other guilt is contemptible in magnitude and trivial in effect. Jesus Christ teaches another doctrine: He points to a higher crime--that higher crime, the sin against the Holy Spirit, He leaves without specific and curious definition that out of its possibility may come a continual fear, and a perpetual discipline. Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby you are sealed to the day of redemption!

2. Our second lesson is a caution against mere intellectual sagacity in directing the affairs of the Christian kingdom. It is admitted on all hands that Judas Iscariot was far ahead of the other apostles in many intellectual qualities, yet "Judas by transgression fell." How self-controlled he was, how stealthy was his step, how lingering and watchful his cunning! And if Whately and De Quincey be right in the suggestion that he merely wanted to force the Lord to declare Himself the Prince of princes and make Israel glad by despoiling the oppressor, it discovers the instinct of statesmanship, and shows how his strategic ambition sought to ensnare the Roman fowler in his own net.

Judas is supposed to have reasoned thus with himself: This Jesus is He who will redeem Israel; the whole twelve of us think so; yet He hesitates, for some reason we cannot understand; His power is astounding, His life is noble. This will I do, I will bring things to a crisis by going to the authorities and making them an offer. I believe they will snatch at my proposition, and when they come to work it out He will smite them with His great power, and will avenge the insult by establishing His supremacy as King and Lord of Israel. As a matter of fact we know that this kind of reasoning has played no small part in the history of the church. The spiritual kingdom of Christ has suffered severely at the hands of men who have been proud of their own diplomacy and generalship; men fond of elaborating intricate organizations, of playing one influence against another, and of making up for the slowness of time by dramatic surprises alike of sympathy and collision. It is for this reason that I cannot view without alarm the possible misuse of congresses, conferences, unions, and councils: these institutions will only be of real service to the cause of the Cross in proportion as spiritual influence is supreme--once let political sagacity, diplomatic ingenuity, and official adroitness in the management of details, become unduly valued, and you change the center of gravity, and bring the church into imminent peril.

Unquestionably human nature loves dexterity and will pay high prices for all kinds of conjuring, and loudly applaud the hero who does apparent impossibilities. From this innate love of mere cleverness may come betrayals, compromises, and casuistries which crucify the Son of God afresh. Judas looked to the end to vindicate if not to sanctify the means; and this is the policy of all dexterous managers, the very soul of Jesuistry, and a chosen instrument of the devil. I do not pray for a leader, fertile in resource, supple and prompt in movement. My prayer is for a man of another stamp, even for an Inspirer, who, by the ardor of his holiness, the keenness of his spiritual insight, and the unction of his prayers, shall help us truthward and heavenward. Under his leadership we shall hear no more about secularities and temporalities, but every action--the opening of the doors and the lighting of the lamps of the sanctuary--shall be done by hands which were first outstretched in prayer. Not the crafty Judas, but the loving John will help us best in all our work; not the man inexhaustible in tricks of management, but the man of spiritual intelligence and fervor, will deliver us most successfully in the time of straits and dangers. Managers, leaders, draftsmen, and pioneers, we shall of course never cease to want, and their abilities will always be of high value to every good cause; yet one thing is needful above all others--closeness to the dear Lord, and daily continuance in prayer.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/joseph-parker/judas-iscariot-a-study-in-character/>

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