

# (Gaining God's Approval) 9. the Testing of Peter and Judas

by Zac Poonen

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*The sermon highlights the importance of being tested and approved by God, and how Peter and Judas' reactions to correction and wealth demonstrate the difference between being approved by God and failing the test.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 16:22, Matthew 26:14, Luke 5:1, Luke 6:38, Luke 12:21, Luke 16:11, John 6:68, John 12:4, John 13:29, Acts 3:6, Acts 20:35

**Topics:** "Faith And Wealth", "Humility And Correction"

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## Description

Zac Poonen contrasts the attitudes of Peter and Judas Iscariot towards money and correction. Peter, when called by Jesus, immediately left his fishing business to follow Him, prioritizing eternal wealth over earthly riches. In contrast, Judas Iscariot, although chosen as an apostle, failed the test of faithfulness by stealing money meant for the poor and betraying Jesus for personal gain. Peter embraced correction from Jesus, recognizing it as words of eternal life, while Judas, offended by correction, ultimately chose to betray Jesus. The sermon emphasizes the importance of humility in receiving correction and the eternal consequences of our responses.

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## Transcript

Among the twelve apostles that Jesus chose, perhaps the greatest contrast in personality was between Peter and Judas Iscariot. Peter was simple, unlearned and warm-hearted. Judas Iscariot was intelligent, shrewd and ambitious.

### Peter's Attitude to Money

God had a great calling for Simon Peter. But it could not be fulfilled until he had been tested and approved.

Peter however had no idea about God's wonderful plan, at the time that Jesus called him. God unfolds His plan to us only one step at a time.

One day Jesus came into Peter's boat and told him to put out the boat into deep water and to let down his nets for a catch. Peter did so and caught the greatest catch of his lifetime (Lk. 5:1-11).

If Peter had been like some Christian businessmen today, he would have said something like this to Jesus, "Lord, this is fantastic. Let us - you and I - be partners. You do the preaching and I will support you financially. If my fishing business is going to be like this, I will soon be the richest businessman in all Israel; and my tithes will support not only you but a host of other Christian workers in many parts of this land and abroad as well!"

Peter could then have gone around the world giving his testimony at various conferences for businessmen and taught businessmen about a Christ who could make their businesses prosper.

Such is the reasoning of the carnal mind.

But Peter didn't do that. When Jesus called him to leave his nets, He left his fishing business immediately and followed Jesus. He passed the test.

Little do Christians realise when God prospers their ways so that they earn more money that they are being tested. Most Christians fail the test here. They settle for being empty millionaires when they could perhaps have become apostles.

Years later, Peter, far from being a wealthy businessman, could only say, "I do not possess silver and gold."(Acts 3:6). But he had something far better than silver and gold. He had given up the rubbish of earthly wealth for the eternal wealth of Christ's kingdom.

Christian bookshops are flooded these days with books that claim to teach Christians how to become materially prosperous and to make money, with Jesus as a partner in one's life! Christians are encouraged in these books to claim expensive cars, and houses and lands - all by faith in Christ.

Even though a child can see the earthly-mindedness of these writers, yet many believers are being deceived. The testimonies given therein of people receiving material things may all be true - but how many of them realised that God was testing them when he gave them wealth? They were being tested when they became rich to see whether they would learn to give away their wealth and become 'rich towards God' (Lk.12:21). But they all failed the test - unlike Peter.

Self is the centre of every child of Adam. When we are converted, Self does not die, but seeks in subtle ways to make God also to serve its own interests. This is the source of the carnal Christianity that majors on getting material and physical blessings from God and that comes to us nowadays in these books, clothed in the garb of 'faith'.

Yet these books serve a purpose too, in that they reveal what the hearts of their readers truly desire - the earthly or the heavenly. Thus the wheat is sifted from the chaff in Christendom!

#### Peter's Attitude to Correction

We see how Jesus tested Peter in yet another way when He rebuked Peter publicly with the sharpest rebuke that He ever gave any human being.

When Jesus told His disciples that He was going to be rejected and crucified, Peter, with intense human love for the Lord "took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, 'God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You'"(Mt.16:22).

Jesus turned around and publicly said to Peter (in the hearing of the other apostles), "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to Me" (Mt.16:23).

It is quite insulting to our ego to be rebuked publicly. It is far worse to be called `Satan'.

Yet Peter never got offended.

When many of Jesus' disciples got offended with the message of death to Self that Jesus preached, and left Him, Jesus asked the twelve apostles whether they would like to go away too. It was Peter then who replied saying, "Lord, to whom shall we go. You have words of eternal life"(Jn.6:68).

These words were uttered by Peter soon after he had received that strong rebuke from Jesus' lips. That is what makes Peter's words even more wonderful. He felt that any words of rebuke from Jesus' lips were only words of eternal life!

Our ability to accept rebuke from an older brother is a test of our humility.

Peter passed the test with flying colours.

Judas' Attitude to Money

Judas Iscariot being one of the twelve apostles whom Jesus selected, had just as good a chance as the others to qualify for the certificate "Approved by God".

But like the others he too had to be tested.

The gospel record says that "Judas Iscariot became a traitor." (Lk.6:16). This implies that he was just as sincere as the other eleven disciples when Jesus chose him. But he backslid terribly through selfish ambition.

The Bible warns us, "Where selfish ambition exists, there is disorder and every evil thing." (Jas.3:16).

Judas' life is a warning to all of us, for it is possible for anyone of us to become like him, if we are not careful.

He was the treasurer of Jesus' team and he had ample opportunity to prove his faithfulness in the area of mammon. He could have become one of the authors of the New Testament epistles, if he had been faithful. His name would certainly have been on one of the foundation stones of the wall of the New Jerusalem.

The Bible says that "the wall of the city (New Jerusalem) had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb."(Rev. 21:14).

But Judas Iscariot failed when tested.

One of the uses of the money-bag was to have funds to give to the poor and the needy (as we can see from John 13:29): "For some were supposing, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus was saying to him, that he should give something to the poor."

Judas professed to have an interest in this activity but he stole all the money that was donated for the poor.

It is written that "Judas Iscariot.....was not concerned about the poor, but he was a thief, and as he had the money box, he used to pilfer what was put into it."(Jn. 12:4-6).

We could ask the question, "Why didn't Jesus expose Judas straight-away?"

To answer that question, we could ask another question, "Why doesn't Jesus expose all those who are making money for themselves in the name of Christianity today?" There are thousands who serve God for money even today, and who are not 100% honest with the money that is given to them for God's work.

But the Lord is patient. He gives time for everyone to be tested.

If only Judas could have known what he was going to miss by choosing money, how differently he might have acted! And if only today's Christian workers knew what they are missing by choosing money, how differently they would act in relation to money!!

Judas' problem was that he loved to receive but hated to give.

Jesus had taught His disciples the blessedness of giving. "The Lord Jesus Himself said, `It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"(Acts 20:35).

Peter understood that. But not Judas. Judas thought that happiness came through receiving more and more.

Every Christian falls into one of these two categories: Those like Peter, who forsake all and who love to give to God and to others in need; and those, like Judas, who love to receive and to hoard up for themselves. If ever these Judases give, it will be in a miserly way, just to ease their conscience - and that too with great reluctance! They have no reluctance however, when it comes to receiving!!

God tests us in the matter of receiving and giving to see whether we desire to live by the principles of the world or of His kingdom.

If we are to be approved by God, we will have to radically crucify the love to receive gifts that is found in our flesh. We will have to unlearn old habits and learn new ones instead. As much as we have been experts at receiving gifts in the past, we can now become experts at giving.

But we can't hope to become experts at anything overnight. It is only constant practice that can make us experts at anything. We have to begin to give and then continue at it until our character has been truly transformed, so that finally God Himself can testify concerning us that we would rather give than receive.

The true disciple of Jesus is one who has learnt how to be rich towards God and how to give to others who are in need. In his own time of need, he will find that God gives back to him in the same measure that he gave out.

Jesus told His disciples, "Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, they will pour into your lap. For whatever measure you deal out to others, it will be dealt to you in return."(Lk. 6:38).

Jesus taught that if we were unfaithful with earthly things we could never hope to receive spiritual riches from God. He said, "If you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous mammon, who will entrust the true riches to you?" (Lk. 16:11).

The Lord put Judas Iscariot on probation with the money-bag and he failed. His loss was eternal.

Today you and I are on probation with our money-bag.

Judas' Attitude to Correction

We saw that Peter was tested by Jesus in his reaction to being corrected publicly. Judas was tested in this area too. But unlike Peter, he failed.

When a woman poured an alabaster vial of perfume at Jesus' feet, out of gratitude for what the Lord had done for her, Judas expressed his opinion that it was a waste of money. Jesus however, took the side of the woman and said, "Let her alone, in order that she may keep it for the day of My burial. For the poor you have always with you; but you do not always have Me."(Jn.13:7,8).

One can hardly say that Jesus rebuked Judas Iscariot at all here. In fact, compared to the way Jesus rebuked Peter, this was nothing!

Yet Judas Iscariot was offended.

In the parallel passage in Matthew's gospel, we read about what Judas did immediately after this event: "THEN Judas Iscariot went to the chief priests and said, `What are you willing to give me to deliver Him up to you?'" (Matt.26:14,15).

The word `Then' is significant here. The immediate provocation that prompted Judas to go to the priests and to offer to betray Jesus to them was his being corrected by the Lord.

Peter passed the test triumphantly. But Judas failed miserably.

Today you and I are tested whenever we are corrected by those whom God has placed in authority over us.

Children are tested when they are corrected by their parents. Wives are tested when they are corrected by their husbands. Employees are tested when they are corrected by their employers. And in the church, we are all tested when we are corrected by our elders.

Our reaction to correction is one of the clearest tests of our humility. If we get offended we are in company with Judas Iscariot.

If we find that we do get offended when corrected, we need to cry out to God for help that we might die to our ego, so that we don't miss out on our eternal reward.

Eternal issues hung on Peter's and Judas' reactions to correction. Little did they realise that they were under probation.

Little do many of us realise that God is watching our reaction to correction as well.

You cannot be approved by God if you are unwilling to be corrected or if you get offended when corrected.

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