

The Person Most Likely to Betray

Luke 22:1-6

In many high schools, the senior class every year elects one from its number who has the most promise, the most potential for success. Their predictions sometimes are way off base, but they select that young man or young woman whom they believe is “The One Most Likely to Succeed.” There were no elections of that nature among the disciples of Jesus, but if there had been a category entitled, “The One Most Likely to Betray,” the chances are good that the person selected would not have been Judas Iscariot.

Today, the name Judas is a name linked to wickedness and treachery. It is a name which no loving mother would give to her child. At one time the name “Judas” was a good name, at least until Christ was crucified. In Hebrew it means “Praise of God.” One of the most famous military leaders in Jewish history was named “Judas.”

And originally, this man Judas who followed Jesus must have been a promising candidate for discipleship. Jesus must have seen something in his life that had great potential for service in the kingdom of God.

But we see in our Scripture passage for today that things didn’t turn out that way. Judas betrayed Jesus into the hands of the enemies who eventually had him crucified. Judas became “The One Most Likely to Betray Jesus” step by step, little bit by little bit, an inch at a time.

What happened to him? Why did he betray Jesus? Those are questions that many people have asked through the years, and there are many, many theories and educated guesses. I think that for our purposes we can look to the Scriptures and to the period of history to discover that there are certain characteristics of “The Person Most Likely to Betray” Jesus Christ. These are especially true in our world today. Here are the characteristics of the person most likely to betray Jesus Christ:

1 He knows about Jesus.
For nearly three years Judas had traveled about with the other disciples and Jesus. Together they had watched the crippled limbs straighten as Jesus touched them. Judas had seen Lazarus raised back to life after being dead for four days. He had heard the Master Teacher tell about the coming Kingdom of God. He had heard Jesus preach about real life, and real love, and about what it

would cost to follow Him. Judas had sat at the very feet of Jesus as the Lord explained the parables He told to the crowds. Judas had such a privilege that you and I would be envious of, and yet he rejected Christ as his own personal Lord and Savior.

Judas knew who Jesus was; there was no questioning that. He was no stranger. And yet, in spite of all that, he had never taken the step of faith that allowed Christ to become Lord of his life. That one main ingredient was missing from his experience with Christ, and because of that, Judas became the one disciple most likely to betray Jesus to the authorities.

Our churches today are filled with people who have grown up *knowing about* Christ, yet have never come to the point in their lives when they surrender to Christ and ask Him to come in as Lord and Savior of their lives. They have been privileged as few people around the world are privileged, to be able to attend worship services in a local church every Sunday, and sometimes more often than that. They have been privileged to hear some of the greatest preachers of our day as they open the Living Word of God. They are privileged in being able to own a personal copy of the Bible, and to read from its pages on their own. We in America have become so familiar with the Gospel that we have also become hardened to its Message. We claim to know Jesus, but too often we merely know *about* Jesus; and there is a big difference between the two.

It is the very person who sits under good preaching, who may even be the one doing that preaching, who holds elected offices in the church, who has gained the respect of others in the community, who is most likely to betray Jesus in his personal living. Why? Because that is the person Satan can most effectively use to hinder the work of God.

It is not the murderer or the alcoholic or the prostitute who hinders God's work! It is the person who claims to belong to Christ on Sunday, and yet when Monday comes, lives just like the world lives. That is the person most likely to betray Jesus in his personal life.

A second characteristic is very closely related to the first.

2 He outwardly appears to be religious.

Judas was a Jew, and because he had been given such an honorable name, no doubt his parents had held high hopes for this boy of theirs. He had probably received strict religious training as a child, either at his own home or at the local synagogue—or perhaps both.

As a man, when he joined the disciples of Jesus, he was such an outwardly good man that he became entrusted with the treasury of the twelve disciples. It never contained much money, which was all the more reason why the money had to be handled carefully. He may have had such an honest face that all the other disciples regarded him to be above suspicion in the matter of handling money. You'll notice that they did not elect Matthew, the former tax collector, to be the treasurer!

And on their last night together, when Jesus announced that one of the twelve should betray Him, you'll remember that one by one the disciples asked Jesus, "Lord, is it I?" Not a single one of them said, "It's Judas! I always suspected he would do something like that!" No. Apparently no one suspected him as being the betrayer, because on the outside, he was a good man.

In the sixth verse of Luke 22, we see where Judas began to seek an opportunity to betray Jesus "*when no crowd was present.*" It turned out that the time for the actual betrayal had to be at night, when most of the people in the city of Jerusalem were asleep. And we might stop here long enough to say that it is always night in the soul of a person who is actively involved in betraying the Christ.

But Judas wanted to betray Jesus in the absence of the crowd, *in private!* Modern-day Judases do not try to betray Jesus in public, out where everyone can see. It is in private that the actual betrayal is accomplished and becomes reality in the life. On the outside we are religious, which is a good "safe" word, but on the inside, in the deepest recesses of our private lives, we are betraying Christ with nearly every breath we take.

Again, look at how Judas betrayed Christ. You should be familiar enough with the story to remember that Judas walked up to Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane and kissed Jesus on the cheek—an obvious sign of devotion and friendship, at least on the outside. But Jesus knew what was inside Judas' heart, and Jesus knew that the person whose outward living does not match his heart is the person most likely to betray Christ.

Once again, there are many people right here in churches across our land, perhaps in our own, whose lives are the epitome of righteousness, at least on the outside. As long as they are in the public eye, they are truly disciples of Christ. But think what happens when they get in their homes, or when they think no one else is around.

The things they do, the things they think, and the things they are involved in are the kinds of things which prove where their real allegiances lie. On the outside they are religious, but on the inside, they are definitely not Christ-like.

And these are the people most likely to betray Jesus Christ in their lives.

They may be trusted by other people. They may be involved in doing many good things. They may even give outward signs of devotion and love for Christ. But their hearts need a serious cleansing by the blood of Christ. They've walked an aisle somewhere, perhaps even years ago, and they've taken a preacher by the hand, and they've joined a church, and they've been baptized, but never once have they asked for forgiveness of sins. Never once have they completely surrendered to Christ as Lord of their lives.

And the most likely candidate for betraying Christ is the person who goes through all the motions without ever, ever allowing Christ to be the Lord of both his public and his private life.

3 He tries to press Jesus into a mold.

What do we mean by that? It is probably a much briefer way of saying that many of us have pre-conceived ideas about who Jesus is, what He should do for us, when He is to be trusted. We build little shelves in our lives, and as long as Jesus can safely and comfortably fit into one of the nooks there, everything is okay. We try to make Jesus be the kind of Savior we can be comfortable with. We like a Savior who doesn't demand too much of us, One who won't ask us to give up anything, one that can be pulled down from the shelves as one would pull down a bottle of aspirin when he has a headache.

That is exactly what Judas was doing. One of the theories about Judas says that he was a member of the Zealot movement, that he was a fanatic regarding Israel's political future. Judas was not alone in assuming that when the Messiah appeared as foretold in the Hebrew Scriptures, He would be a man who would sweep the Romans into the sea and free the Jewish people from the Emperor. He would simply come riding into town on a white stallion and with a single word would

recruit enough young men to suppress and destroy any enemy. He would come with a flaming sword in his hand and a sparkling dream in his heart to found a new earthly kingdom. That was a very common perception of the coming Messiah at the time.

So, when Jesus the Messiah arrived, and when He began to heal crippled limbs and blind eyes and deaf ears, and when He began to raise people back to life, and when He walked upon the waves of the sea, Judas began to realize that here indeed was the man they had been looking for. Things were really going great! Judas began to have visions of personal glory and power as he himself would be involved in founding this new kingdom. His heart must have been pounding in his breast as the people waved the palm branches that day when Jesus entered Jerusalem!

And when Jesus entered the Temple and began driving out those who sold there, Judas must have been smiling as he thought to himself, “Now, *this* is my kind of Messiah!”

But then Jesus began speaking of His death. He had done it before, but now there was a sense of urgency in His message. Jesus began noticing little things, like the widow who cast two small coins, called “mites,” into the temple treasury. Things just weren’t moving fast enough for Judas. So, as one theory has it, Judas decided that he would try to force Jesus’ hand a little bit. He would arrange it so that Jesus would be in such a precarious position that He would have to use a little of His miraculous power to save Himself. He would have to go ahead then and set up His earthly kingdom. Judas was apparently determined that Jesus would be the kind of Messiah that he wanted Him to be. It was time to leave this role of the Suffering Servant, and time to become the Conquering Messiah!

So he betrayed Jesus.

There are just as many false ideas and perceptions of the Savior today. There are some who consider Jesus to be a weak, pale-looking creature whose picture hangs upon a wall in a rarely-used Sunday School room. It is more comfortable when you think about it, to have the kind of Savior who never interferes with your way of living, who lives up there at the church building, and who never comes out.

There are some who like to think of Jesus as being the kind of Lord who remains silent until we get into trouble. We virtually ignore Jesus and His claims upon our lives until we get ourselves so backed up into a corner that there is no way out.

Then all we have to do is call upon Jesus, who will gladly and willingly rush in to help us out of our trouble.

But there's something wrong with all that. Jesus just won't fit into the molds we have for Him. He comes into the world as Savior and Lord and Redeemer and Conqueror of Evil and Sin and Death, and He demands perfect and undying allegiance from those who would follow Him. And when we try to make Jesus be lowly, meek and mild, without surrendering our lives and hearts to Him, we fail miserably. When we refuse to see Jesus as being who He really is, we become the people most likely to betray Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

4 He is controlled by self.

This of all characteristics was evident in the life of Judas. In Matthew's account of the meeting between Judas and the chief priests, we see that Judas asked the question, "What will you give me if I hand Jesus over to you?" The price agreed upon was thirty pieces of silver, roughly equivalent to about twenty dollars. And there have been some scholars who have pointed to this and claimed that greed was the reason for Judas' betrayal.

But I think it goes deeper than that. Judas was after power, prestige, and social status. He looked forward to that time when Jesus would set up an earthly kingdom, and would make His disciples joint rulers with Him. He had followed Jesus in the high hopes that one day he would share in that glorious rule. For Judas, self was more interesting than Christ.

How Christ is betrayed today by those who are controlled by self! Judas may have reacted out of bitterness and disappointment when Jesus would not be the kind of Messiah Judas thought Him to be. Things didn't go exactly the way that Judas wanted them to, and so perhaps to get even, Judas betrayed Him.

Let's don't be too harsh with Judas, because many times you and I do the same thing. Things don't go just the way we want them to, and selfishness rears its ugly head. We don't run out and sell Jesus for thirty pieces of silver, but we do other things to tear down the work of God: things like destroying our personal testimonies, things like gossiping and tearing down other Christians. We get our feelings hurt when we don't get our way, and we do everything we can to make sure that the work is hindered.

We may not do it intentionally as Judas did, but oftentimes the result is the same. And when we allow self to control our lives and the things we do in our lives, then we become the people most likely to betray Christ.

How does the story end? For Judas, it ended tragically. He could have received forgiveness. To believe anything less than that is to deny what the Bible teaches. But once again that pride and control by self dominated. It appears that Judas could not force himself to seek out Jesus and ask for forgiveness. The only alternative for Judas was for him to do just exactly what he did—commit suicide!

And there are perhaps many here today who have stood in the pews time after time when the invitation was given, and refused to trust Christ as Savior, who have refused to ask for forgiveness, because of their pride and their fear of what someone may think or say. And for that reason, many people who know about Christ, who outwardly appear to be very religious, who try to press Jesus into a little mold, who are controlled by self—those are the very people who are committing spiritual suicide.

Are you one of those most likely to betray Jesus in your life? It doesn't have to end the way the story of Judas ends. You can have forgiveness. You can have a new life in Christ, by admitting you are a sinner in need of a Savior, by forgetting your pride and fear of what others will think, and by accepting by faith the redeeming work of the Savior on the Cross.

Instead of merely knowing about Christ, get to know Him personally. Put more investment of your time and resources into personal holiness, and forsake the outward trappings of religion. Let Jesus be who He really is, instead of trying to make Him who you think He should be. And instead of allowing self to control your life, surrender to Christ and allow Him to take over every nook and cranny of your heart and life.

Something glorious and wonderful can happen to you today!