

## **Followers of the Way**

### **The leadership challenge of Judas - how evil still tries to thwart the message today**

#### **Philip Quenby 23-10-22**

##### **Mark 14:1-26**

As King Solomon said, “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven” (Ecclesiastes 3:1). In this chapter 14 of Mark’s Gospel, the challenge to Jesus reaches a crescendo both from the outside, through “the chief priests and the teachers of the law” (Mark 14:1) and from the inside through “Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve” (Mark 14:10), a member of the inner circle of Christ’s closest friends. And the timing isn’t accidental: “the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were only two days away” (Mark 14:1), and Jesus will fulfil these two Feasts of the LORD – Passover, through being “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29) and Unleavened Bread by voluntarily relinquishing His own sinless life (a life without the leaven of sin). We see everything that’s needed for the completion of God’s purposes unfolding according to His fore-ordained plan, so even “while [Jesus] was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of a man called Simon the Leper” (Mark 14:3), a woman came to anoint him with perfume “to prepare [him] for [his] burial” (Mark 14:8).

The perfection of God’s arrangements is shown again when Jesus told two of his disciples, “Go into the city, and a man carrying a water jar on his head will meet you. Follow him. Say to the owner of the house he enters, ‘The Teacher asks: where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ He will show you a large upper room, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there.” (Mark 14:13-15). These disciples duly “found things just as Jesus had told them.” (Mark 14:16).

(The man carrying a water jar, by the way, was almost certainly an Essene – the sect responsible for the Dead Sea Scrolls. Though most Jews would have considered carrying water women’s work, Essenes had a more egalitarian attitude to the sexes. And the Essene calendar differed from the Jewish secular and religious calendars, meaning Essenes worked on days other Jews treated as a Sabbath or other kind of non-working day. So, if anyone tries to say the Gospels’ timings of the events of Passion Week don’t work, just remember there are three calendars in operation – the priestly calendar, the secular calendar and the Essene calendar. If that’s taken into account, everything fits like a glove.)

Despite knowing about the impending betrayal of Judas and His own need to undergo the agonies of crucifixion, Jesus is focussed utterly on God’s rescue mission for fallen humanity. He used the Passover meal to announce his sacrifice in the breaking of bread (Mark 14:22), to proclaim the new covenant in his blood through drinking the third cup of the Passover meal – the cup of redemption (Mark 14:23-24) and to look forward to the eventual Marriage Supper of the Lamb “when [he] will drink [the cup of wine] anew in the kingdom of God” (Mark 14:25). These are weighty things worthy of sermons in their own right, but what we’ll be concentrating on is the leadership challenge of Judas. Just as in any good whodunnit, for Judas to take this to its logical conclusion by betraying Jesus, there had to be motive, opportunity and means. So, we’ll look at those three things, then consider the nature of the leadership challenge Judas posed and what this has to say to us now.

##### **Motive**

Character and motive overlap, since motivations differ according to character type. Someone fixated on money won't necessarily be motivated by the same things as one who's main concern is sensual pleasure, for example. The Bible gives some pointers about the kind of character Judas was.

Outwardly, he looked to be a true believer. When Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me" (Mark 14:18), other disciples didn't instantly know Judas was who He was talking about. Instead, "one by one they said to him, 'Surely not I?'" (Mark 14:19). When (at an earlier stage of Jesus' earthly ministry) "many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him" (John 6:66), Judas wasn't one of them. If we'd been there at the time and judged by appearances, we'd probably have thought Judas was the real deal.

Judas was with the Twelve when they were sent out by Jesus to "preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near' [and] heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy [and] drive out demons" (Matthew 10:7-8). (Luke 10:20). If we'd seen what was going on and judged by actions and results, we'd probably have said Judas had what it takes.

But Judas' heart wasn't right. His motivations were all wrong. John's Gospel tells us more about what was said when the woman anointed Jesus with perfume: "one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, objected, 'Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages.' He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it." (John 12:4-6). Presumably, the other disciples only found that out after Judas betrayed Jesus – though, of course, the Lord knew it from the start (see John 6:64, 6:70-71).

(Incidentally, Judas clearly wasn't the only one complaining about a supposed "waste of perfume", as Mark 14:4 says, "some of those present were [speaking] indignantly to one another". These might have been among other guests at Simon the Leper's house, or members of Simon's own household. Whether they were part of Jesus' group or not, we don't know, but since John's Gospel specifically singles out Judas, he was almost certainly the only one of the Twelve to talk this way.)

Judas was grasping and greedy, unwilling to share and concerned first and foremost about himself. Someone like this resents anyone else having what he thinks he alone deserves and would, if possible, keep all the good things for himself. It's a dog-in-a-manger mentality that selfishly withholds things, and out of spite wants to prevent others having what they don't.

Jesus rebuked Judas, saying "Leave her alone ... Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing for me ... I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her." (Mark 14:6-9, with John 12:7-8 showing these words were directed primarily at Judas). It's a fair bet Judas smarted over the public telling-off, and resented a supposedly disreputable and shameless woman being honoured in a way he'd never been.

This incident seems to have been a trigger for Judas to act – the final straw that pushed him decisively over the threshold of what he'd been tiptoeing around for a long time – since the very next verse records how "*Then* Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them." (Mark 14:10, emphasis added).

### **Opportunity**

Wounded pride, thirst for revenge, a desire to justify himself, a religious spirit affronted by how Jesus failed to comply with conventional ideas and behaviour. Perhaps a conviction that he could do a better job, resentment that his talents weren't properly recognised and disappointment that Jesus wasn't turning out to be the kind of Messiah he expected or wanted. The desire for status and affirmation

from the world, even a wish to put himself at the head of and become a spokesman for those who spoke “indignantly” (Mark 14:4) against what they’d just seen. And, of course, the thirst for monetary gain. Judas had motive in spades, but also needed opportunity.

Up to that moment, Jesus had skilfully deflected or avoided every attack against Him. Plenty wanted Him out of the way, yet every attempt to portray him as a false prophet or even to kill him had failed. There was no power or authority that could prevail against God’s Anointed One. As Jesus himself said, “The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life – only to take it up again. No-one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again.” (John 10:17-18). At one point, people from Nazareth “drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.” (Luke 4:30). His command over demons and command over nature meant the authorities were scared of him. Added to which, at this stage there were still many among the common people who supported him. And so, although “the chief priests and teachers of the law were looking for some sly way to arrest Jesus and kill him [they nevertheless said] ‘Not during the Feast ... or the people may riot.’” (Mark 14:1-2).

But in an instant, something radically changed. Jesus was now talking openly about His death, speaking of “[preparing] for my burial” (Mark 14:8). Instinctively realising this was his moment, Judas “went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them. They were delighted to hear this and promised to give him money. So he watched for an opportunity to hand [Jesus] over.” (Mark 14:10-11). As we know, he didn’t have to wait long for that opportunity to come.

### **Means**

At the Last Supper, Jesus gave Judas a piece of bread dipped in his own bowl (Mark 14:20, John 13:26), and “as soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out.” (John 13:30). So, significantly, it seems Judas didn’t receive wine from the cup of redemption. When he left the Upper Room, we can assume Judas straight away went to see the Jewish leaders he’d spoken to earlier, later “guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and Pharisees” (John 18:3) to the Mount of Olives so they could arrest Jesus and bring Him to trial.

The methods used to entrap Jesus were typical of Satan’s way of working – Judas and his accomplices among “the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some sly way to arrest Jesus and kill him.” (Mark 14:1). The word sly means crafty, cunning, stealthily artful, underhand, not open or frank, in secret, on the quiet, by use of subterfuge – just as the serpent in Eden was “crafty”: Genesis 3:1. Judas’ betrayal was a shameful deed done in the dark, away from prying eyes or inconvenient witnesses, a coming together of Satan’s last-ditch attempt to derail God’s rescue plan for humanity.

Tragically, Judas had by this time become fully Satan’s instrument. Luke’s Gospel says, “Satan entered Judas” (Luke 22:3) and John’s Gospel records the precise instant this happened, stating that it occurred “as soon as Judas had taken the bread” (John 13:30) Christ offered from His own bowl. John underlines the spiritual darkness of this moment with four simple words: “And it was night.” (John 13:30).

Judas became at one and the same time the means Satan used to further his diabolical plan, and one of the instruments by which God brought His purposes to fruition. Speaking after Jesus’ death and resurrection, Peter described Judas as “one of our number [who] shared in this [apostolic] ministry ... which [he] left to go where he belongs.” (Acts 1:17 and 25). But he also reminded his audience of how the manner of Judas’ death fulfilled prophecy, for, “it is written in the book of Psalms, ‘May his place be deserted; let there be no-one to dwell in it,’ and, ‘May another take his place of leadership.’” (Acts 1:20, quoting Psalm 69:25 and Psalm 109:8).

It's important to put all this in context. Judas wasn't always in Satan's grip to the extent he became at the end. He wasn't doomed from the start and he never ceased to have Free Will. But he allowed his character flaws to get the better of him, and opened himself up to Satan in a way that eventually allowed outright demonic possession. Judas aided and abetted the people who wanted to kill Jesus, becoming an accomplice to murder. There was anger in his heart, and when something's in our heart, there's always the danger this will translate into action. That's why, when speaking of murder, Jesus warns, "anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment" (Matthew 7:22) or "anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Matthew 7:28). Before Cain took the fateful step of killing his brother Abel, God told him, "But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it." (Genesis 4:7). Judas failed to master sin. As a result, he died a horrible death (Matthew 27:3-10, Acts 1:18-19) and faces an eternity of torment.

### **The nature of Judas' leadership challenge**

Judas' leadership challenge came from a place of bitterness and disappointment, stirred up by greed and turbocharged by self-righteousness rooted in a religious spirit. It came from within the group of people closest to the Lord, in rebellion against godly rule and godly order – and "rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry." (1 Samuel 15:23, KJV).

The focal point of the challenge was over the proper use of resources and having a proper attitude towards people. It took the form of a certain type of religiosity which can often look impressive on the outside, but whose heart condition is not what God seeks. It's telling that, though Pharisees and Sadducees were diametrically opposed on many issues, they both agreed Jesus was a threat and had to be disposed of – by hook or by crook – and Judas was happy to throw in his lot with them.

Satan challenged Jesus directly by tempting Him in the wilderness, and failed (Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 1:12-13, Luke 4:1-13). He challenged Him a second time by stirring Peter to tempt Christ to turn aside from the way of suffering and death, and again Jesus was alert to the threat (Matthew 16:22-23, Mark 8:32-33). The challenge through Judas was more indirect. Having not succeeded in gaining access by the front door, Satan went round the back. He infiltrated the Church.

### **Application**

Here's where we get to our own day and our own circumstances. If we're going to partner effectively with God and be fruitful co-labourers with Him in the building of His kingdom, we need to close off as best we can the enemy's avenues of attack against us and through us. As Judas shows, there are issues of motive that we need to examine in our own lives, not allowing our weaknesses to get the better of us, and asking God to help us work on our character flaws. That's part of the internal vigilance we're called to exercise to "continue to work out [our] salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12).

But there's also an issue of external vigilance. Jesus warns, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" (Matthew 7:21-23).

There's a leadership challenge to Jesus going on right now from within what calls itself the Church. It's happening because Satan can't question the authority of Jesus directly, so he's going round the back way. He thinks if he can undermine the Church from within, he's still in with a chance. This challenge often expresses itself as a contest over proper use of resources and over what makes for righteousness in our dealings with other people. Ultimately, it tries to substitute man's ideas for God's ways, to say

the Bible doesn't mean what it says or say what it means. But that way lies the path of damnation. Scripture is our failsafe. If something doesn't marry up with the Word – the entirety of it, not passages selected to prove a point – it's not God. Stay alert and "Test everything." (1 Thessalonians 5:21).