

Were you there when he was betrayed?

Readings: Luke 21:37-22:5; Matthew 27:1-10

Over the next few weeks in the lead up to Easter we will look at different events that happened in these climaxing chapters in the Gospels.

For 21 chapters, since the birth of Jesus, his life has been moving forward to a powerful, gripping climax...his death and resurrection.

In all human history, no events have ever been of greater significance or more specifically prophesied than these.

This drama is the turning point in history...

The very centre of our Christianity.

And in the verses we read today, Jesus is in Jerusalem for the last time.

And it is the time of the celebration for the feast of the Passover.

The Passover celebrates the time when God saved the Israelites and brought them out of Egypt.

Great celebration and partying.

The irony is that while the people celebrated this rescue...

Their leaders were plotting to get rid of the one who offered their eternal rescue/salvation.

But these guys had been opposing Jesus all along, right from the beginning...

building up in intensity throughout the 3 year ministry...

and it has now reached the point where the final act of the drama is to be played out.

The leaders of the people, who hate Jesus, are plotting his arrest and execution.

...looking for a way to finally get him.

The problem was that they didn't know the way to do that...

Then along comes Judas.

Names come in and out of fashion.

There are names that are just not around today, they belong to a past generation

During the past election campaign we were bombarded with the slogan Kevin 07.

Now we have a Prime Minister named Kevin...

But no-one names their child Kevin today!

Asher has a boy in his class named Frank...

And we laugh...because no child is named Frank today!

Names come in and out of fashion...but...

No one ever names their child Judas.

I don't know anyone by that name, and I reckon you don't either.

When we hear the name we suddenly have all these images of what kind of character a Judas would have.

He is shifty, untrustworthy.

He is scheming and double-minded.

He is a betrayer of friendship and trust.

Who would want to call their child Judas!

That's the image we have of Judas...

But that would not have been the way the other disciples saw him.

Remember...the stories we have of Judas were put together after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

That was when the full picture emerged.

But to the other disciples, Judas, just like them, was a close friend of Jesus.

Judas witnessed amazing events...

Jesus walking on the water, thousands fed on the hillside from a boy's lunch.

Judas heard all the stories, the parables, the teachings of Jesus.

Judas was there for the confrontations with the politicians and leaders,

Judas would have been there when Jesus prayed.

He went out with another disciple on the road in ministry.

"When Jesus had called the Twelve together, He gave them power and authority to drive out demons and to cure diseases, and He sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick".

We never read that Judas failed.

Judas was just one of the loyal band of followers.

In fact, he was given a special responsibility...

He was responsible for handling the money.

None of the other disciples had any reason to suspect Judas.

Even on the night before the crucifixion, when Jesus said he was to be betrayed by someone...

No one stood up and pointed a finger at Judas.

So what went wrong?

Somewhere along the way something died.

Whatever it was that caused him to drop his career,

leave behind a stable home life, and follow Jesus –

Whatever passion, whatever hope, whatever dream had propelled Judas, had died.

Judas has moved beyond mere disillusion with Jesus.

If that were all, he would have simply left, just gone home to resume his former life.
The option was there.

But he doesn't.

Disillusionment has become infected and turned to disgust.

Luke records that Satan took over Judas... John says Judas was prompted by Satan.
This doesn't mean that for the first time Judas left the faith... and turned away.
It has the idea of Satan suggesting, tempting, the heart of an unhappy man with the
idea of betraying his Lord.

So Judas, the man fascinated with money,
figures he may as well try to salvage something for himself from this whole
experience
even if it is only a little compared to the 3 years he's given trudging behind this
leader.

Judas Iscariot had a heart that turned ice cold.

How else can you explain the act of betrayal?

Not just pointing out Jesus from behind a bush, but going into the open..... the
greeting..... the kiss?

There are all sorts of theories as to why Judas decided to betray his master.

Some say that he was a political revolutionary and was disappointed when Jesus did
not act in the way that he expected him to, and throw the Romans out.

Others say that it was more frustration than anger and disappointment, and he thought
that by having Jesus arrested it would finally make him act in the way that he thought
a Messiah should.

Either of these may have been part of the story, but both miss a very important factor.

The Bible tells us exactly why Judas did what he did.

He did it for the money...he struck a deal.

Matthew tells us that the price was thirty pieces of silver.

The NIV footnotes tell us that the 30 pieces were equal to 120 Denarii.

1 Denarius= 1 days wage.

120 days pay!

Average weekly wage was given in the paper last week at \$1150

He sold Jesus out for \$27000!!

He went to the chief priests and haggled the best deal he could get.

He wanted some money...30 pieces of silver.

This was prophesied many years earlier by Zechariah...

Read Zechariah 11:12-13

Thirty pieces of silver.

The traditional price of a slave.

The fine that an owner of an ox would have to pay if it gored somebody to death.

A decent sum of money for an ordinary, working man.

A decent sum of money, but not a fortune.

Not enough to make somebody rich or to set them up for life.

That's how important Jesus was to Judas.

That's the value that Judas placed upon Jesus.

Thirty pieces of silver.

We have seen how much value Judas placed upon Jesus - just money.

Now is the time for each of us to face the question of how much we value him.

It is something that each of us must decide ourselves.

It is not just a question of whether or not we believe that he is who he says he is, of whether or not we believe that he died for our sins –

although that is a vital question in itself.

It is not a question of what we say, of what we tell other people, of what we sing.

It is a question of when the crunch comes and when we must choose

between Jesus and our favourite sins,

between Jesus and our careers,

between Jesus and our reputation,

between Jesus and our comfort,

between Jesus and popularity,

between Jesus and our lifestyle.

What do we choose?

Judas valued Jesus at thirty silver coins. How much do you value him?

The deed was done and the price was paid.

Was Judas happy?

No...we read that he was filled with remorse.

He wanted to undo what he had played a part in.

He tries to turn back the clock.

But can't.

Judas slams into a concrete wall of political contempt and cynicism:

"*I have sinned, for I have betrayed innocent blood,*" says Judas to the senior leaders of his church.

"*We don't care. That's your problem,*" comes their reply.

Thirty pieces of silver scatter on the floor of the temple.

A body dangles from a hangman's noose off a tree in a potter's field.

Acts 1 describes some details of the messy end to his tragic life.

When Judas saw how badly he had screwed up why didn't he think about the things that Jesus had said?

"*Come to me, all of you who are tired from carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest.*" (Mt 11:28)

Didn't he remember what he had said to others...

"*I do not condemn you, either. Go and leave your life of sin.*" [Jn 8]

"*Your sins are forgiven.*" [Mk 2]

His greatest mistake was not trusting Jesus in his despair.

The crowning error of Judas's life was not that he betrayed Jesus...

But limiting the grace of God!

You know –

Judas *almost* got it right.

In his sin, he realized his wrong.

He admitted it openly.

He tried to put it behind him.

All *very* important steps!!

He *almost* got it right.

But the *one* item he missed was deadly.

He tried to sort it all out himself.

Figured that if *he* screwed up, like the leaders told him,

he'd have to make it right.

And if *he* couldn't make it right..... there was no right to be had.

Judas accepted the condemnation which the religious leaders offered him.

The chains of guilt dragged him to his grave.

In despair he went and hung himself.

Outside Jerusalem there were, as Max Lucado points out [*No Wonder They Call Him Saviour*], two trees.

A tree of life. And a tree of death.

On the tree of life a man died.

But through his death came life for all who surrender to him.

Punishment is passed off.

Forgiveness is found.

Real, new hope where humanly speaking it would be impossible to fabricate any.

On the other tree dangles the body of a man who carried his heavy load himself, and found no rest.

Who could not come back to the Jesus he had betrayed,
and so found himself in a spiritual wilderness with no forgiveness.

The truth is that we've all had our Judas moments.
We've all done things that have disappointed God.

You say, "Pastor Jim, I've done something REALLY bad. I betrayed trust. I betrayed my family. I betrayed my God. Is there any way I can be forgiven?"

Yes, you can be forgiven. In Luke 23, Jesus is crucified between two thieves. The first one says "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!"

But the second one says, "Don't you fear God, "since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."

Then he says "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

And Jesus says "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

In other words, even if you're the biggest sinner in the world, you're only one prayer away from the mercy of God! All you have to do is say "Lord Jesus, remember me! Take me back! You're the only one who can bring me eternal happiness!" The things of this world make you happy for a moment. But a relationship with God makes you happy forever!

Conclusion

What a terrible thing it was to betray Jesus.

It was a day that lives on in infamy.

Judas spent three years in the closest possible association with the only perfect man who ever lived.

Yet in the end he turned his back on Jesus and gave him up to be murdered.

It was a horrible deed...

And Judas experienced a horrible end.

How could Judas have missed learning what was truly valuable and giving up everything for it?

I don't know.

But I do know that millions are doing today.

Let me remind you that it is possible to be quite close to Jesus Christ, to sit in a Christian Church listening to good sermons, to hear good bible teaching on TV, to

have Christian parents or Christian friends who live consistent, effective Christian lives and bear strong testimony to the grace of God, and yet fail to love Christ and never reach the point of making a personal commitment to him as Lord and Saviour.

You can be that close to Christ and yet be lost.

It would be a tragedy if that was true of you.

But it is not necessarily the way it needs be...

if you understand who Jesus is and what he came to earth to do.

You need to look to him and learn to love him as the one who loves you and gave himself for you.

It is easy to point an accusing finger at Judas...that betrayer, liar and thief.

We would never do anything to betray our Lord and Saviour...or would we?

You and I end up in places and situations where we betray Jesus...

With our words, our actions, our inaction.

In what ways do people betray Jesus?

Sometimes we don't want to get rid of Jesus permanently...just temporarily.

Someone says "God wants you to forgive your brother/sister! God wants you to love him."

And you say, "No, Lord, that's not what I want to hear...you don't realise what they've done!"

We push Jesus out of the way temporarily.

Or maybe someone says "I'm concerned about you drinking in the pubs and clubs late into the night. Nothing good comes from that. Please pray about this."

And you say "Stop! I don't need the Spirit of God hounding me about the way I live my life! As long as I go to church, what difference does it make?"

We push him aside temporarily...we betray Jesus.

I have to confess that I've betrayed Jesus too many times to count.

But I'm humbled beyond words that, when I ask, He forgives and forgets.

It's a humbling experience to confess your sins, but nearly not as bad as not confessing.

If you don't believe me...just ask Judas.

Can you think of a time when you betrayed Jesus and found forgiveness?