

E A S T E R UPSIDE DOWN

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Judas:

Great Expectations and Missed Opportunity

John 6:1-13, John 6:14-15, John 6:67-71, John 12:1-8, Matthew 26:14-16, Mark 14:10-11, John 13:1-11, Matthew 26:20-25; Mark 14:12-21; Luke 22:14-23, John 13:21-30, Matthew 26:24, Matthew 26:47-56, Matthew 27:1-5, John 15:13-14

How could someone who had a front-row seat to observe the life and teachings of Jesus for three years end up missing the opportunity to remain a faithful follower of Jesus and instead betray Jesus as Judas Iscariot did? The answer can be summed up in two words: Great Expectations. While it is challenging to identify the exact moment that was the tipping point for Judas to become the greatest example of a missed opportunity in all of history, a smattering of snapshot moments allows careful observers of Judas' life to piece together a view of the Messiah and His Kingdom that was upside down when compared to what Jesus had in mind. Judas' great expectations of a Messiah were completely misguided and ended up costing him the greatest missed opportunity in history.

Judas Iscariot certainly was one who desired to see the freedom of Israel restored, just as many of his fellow Jewish countrymen did in that day. He came from a lineage of freedom fighters that valued the Jewish heritage in zealous ways as he was raised in the heart of Judah in a place called Kerioth. Judas, just like many Jews, was looking for a Messiah who would turn things right-side up after the oppressive Romans had turned their way of life in Israel upside-down. Judas had great expectations for a Messiah to restore the Kingdom of Israel. And the miracles and teachings he witnessed as he walked closely with Jesus made this carpenter from Nazareth a candidate that just might be the One to do what Judas had long expected in his country and among his people. Perhaps Jesus could bring restored freedom and new hope.

Nobody Judas had ever seen or heard did and said the things quite like Jesus. Nobody could draw a crowd like Jesus. Nobody could demonstrate the kind of power that Jesus seemed to be able to unleash. Healing sick, blind, and lame people was not something just anybody could do; but Judas saw Jesus do it repeatedly as he traveled with Jesus. This man had power. And when Jesus taught in the synagogues or on the side of a hill, He spoke with authority and yet with a profundity that never had been experienced in quite that way.

As the crowds grew to hear and see what Jesus would do next, Judas was nearby to witness Jesus take the lunch of a small boy one day. John 6:1-13 note the contents of five barley loaves and two fish were lifted in a prayer

of thanksgiving before then being distributed to over five-thousand men and many more women and children who were filled with a free lunch that day.

Judas was one of the twelve passing out the fish sandwiches to the masses and may have seen all the pieces of the promised One who could lead a revolution that would conquer Rome and restore the glory of Israel to its rightful place. And as the people from the recorded feast of fish and loaves finished lunch, John's gospel account makes a note that perhaps was one of those snapshot moments that could have caused Judas to shake his head in disbelief.

“When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, ‘This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!’ Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.” John 6:14-15

Perhaps Judas stood there in the middle of his great expectations and thought to himself: “What are you doing, Jesus? This is a moment ripe for revolution, and you are blowing it! These people want to make you their king, and you are slipping out the back door like a thief in the night. How could you make such a huge mistake and not see what is before you? What a missed opportunity to harness a huge following all the way to glory in Jerusalem!”

Judas may have gone to sleep that night, shaking his head in disbelief of what might have been. However, the next day what he heard Jesus teach the crowds of Jews concerning His own body being the bread of life and His blood being necessary for eternal life seemed to make everyone's heads within earshot spin. Judas may have listened with a furrowed brow trying to make sense of what Jesus was talking about to all those who were willing just a meal ago to make Him their king and leader. Now the momentum from the masses was walking away (John 6:66).

A second snapshot then gives us a glimpse into a moment that may have stung Judas while flying over the heads of the rest of the Twelve in the moment.

“So Jesus said to the Twelve, ‘Do you want to go away as well?’ Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.’ Jesus answered them, ‘Did I not choose you, the Twelve? And yet one of you is a devil.’ He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the Twelve, was going to betray him.” John 6:67-71

We do not know for sure how Judas responded when Jesus made this remark about “one of you is a devil.” However, it is reasonable to believe that some of Judas' loyalty to Jesus was carved away just enough to begin giving the devil a foothold in his heart and mind. Just a few more chapters into John's gospel could be another moment where more space is created for the evil one to creep silently into Judas and help chip away at the great expectations of Jesus as Messiah in the money keeper's mind. Pay close attention to Judas' part with Jesus as the scene unfolds in John 12:1-8.

“Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at table. Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, “Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it. Jesus said, “Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me.” John 12:1-8

Judas’ mental image of a mighty Messiah continues to be turned upside down with disappointment, and now Jesus is calling out Judas in front of everybody in the house. More space carved out inside the money-keeper’s mind and heart for the devil to deepen his influence within Judas. Here we see John letting the reader know now what none of them likely knew then about Judas being a thief and stealing from the treasury bag that he had been put in charge of for the group. At least if his great expectations of Jesus as a ruling Messiah-King were being diminished, he still could make it worth his while by skimming from the group’s moneybag. On the outside, Judas made it seem like he cared for the poor when the vase of costly ointment was “squandered” on Jesus. But inside what he saw was money slipping through the cracks in the floor that could have been his to exploit. Jesus saw through it and shut Judas down. While the costly perfume and oil seeped into the floor, the devil’s influence slipped deeper into Judas’ soul.

Matthew’s account of the same scene (26:6-13; cf. Mark 14:3-9) shows what Judas did after Jesus put him in his place after calling out his impure motives.

“Then one of the twelve, whose name was Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, ‘What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?’ And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him.” Matthew 26:14-16; (cf. Mark 14:10-11)

The Passover meal would prove to be the final snapshot when Judas would make his move that would seal his fate leading to eternal regret rather than a missed opportunity of repentance. Even while the devil was at work inside of Judas’ heart and mind, Jesus still demonstrated love to this greedy one who would stab Him in the back with a kiss on the cheek. But before this act of betrayal, Jesus would wash the traitor’s feet. Again, John’s gospel describes the scene.

“Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, do you wash my feet?” Jesus answered him, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.” Peter said to him, “You shall never wash my feet.” Jesus answered him, “If I do

not wash you, you have no share with me.” Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!” Jesus said to him, “The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you.” For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, “Not all of you are clean.” John 13:1-11

No one could scrub the sin stain from the heart of Judas as long as he remained convinced that a true Messiah would handle things quite differently than Jesus as it pertained to freedom and revolution. All four of the gospel accounts (Matthew 26:20-25; Mark 14:12-21; Luke 22:14-23) recount some of the conversation over dinner where Judas is at the line of betrayal of Jesus. However, John’s telling gives a bit more detail in the dialogue of Jesus and Judas.

“After saying these things, Jesus was troubled in his spirit, and testified, “Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.” The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he spoke. One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was reclining at table at Jesus’ side, so Simon Peter motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. So that disciple, leaning back against Jesus, said to him, “Lord, who is it?” Jesus answered, “It is he to whom I will give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it.” So when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. Then after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, “What you are going to do, do quickly.” Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. Some thought that, because Judas had the moneybag, Jesus was telling him, “Buy what we need for the feast,” or that he should give something to the poor. So, after receiving the morsel of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.” John 13:21-30

Rather than repenting in the moment and moving into the light, Judas decides to heed influence from the evil one instead, and move deeper into the darkness. The scene above mentions Jesus having a side conversation with one of the disciples “whom he loved,” which likely was John. Jesus would have been reclining on his left elbow and eating with his right hand, as was the custom of the day. Peter mouthed to John to ask Jesus who He was referring to regarding the one who would betray Him. John and Jesus likely had a whispered conversation where the others could not hear. Jesus then scoops the bread with a topping of either meat or oils for dipping and gives it to Judas. This would have been viewed as a sign of deep and intimate friendship and respect from the host to a guest. In this gesture, Jesus was reaching out to Judas one last time, not only demonstrating His deep love for Judas but also, perhaps, giving him an opportunity to repent.

Nonetheless, Judas crossed over the line of no return when he went from the room full of friends and into the night. Don’t miss the fact that all the disciples around the table at the time had no sense that a betrayal by Judas was underway. While hindsight is twenty-twenty and the gospel writers tag Judas with a moniker of traitor and betrayal later on, at the moment, Judas was good at hiding his true motives and acting religious and sincere when he needed to do so among the twelve. Perhaps there is a bit of Judas in all of us who claim to follow Jesus if we allow ourselves to look deep inside our hearts.

One only can wonder what might have happened had Judas seized the moment and called on Jesus for help in defeating the voice of Satan in his head. How might Jesus have turned things around for Judas had the zealot seeking revolution in Jerusalem shifted his great expectations of the true Messiah and made the most of the

opportunity of forgiveness offered at the table with him? We will never know. But we do know the severity of Judas' choice to betray Jesus.

“The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.” Matthew 26:24

Judas knew Jesus would make His way to the Garden of Gethsemane after dinner, as was His custom. Here He would pray among the olive trees and be isolated from the crowds that convened around Him in the temple courts during the day. This would be the moment where Jesus would be vulnerable to arrest and seizure by the authorities. It was the opportunity Judas had been looking for to turn Jesus over to the religious authorities and the guards under their command. To ensure Jesus would be arrested that night, Judas went and interrupted the Passover meals of the religious leaders to gather them before the window had closed. Nothing would hinder what they had been longing to achieve regarding Jesus being in chains that would lead to His demise; not even the most important celebration meal of Passover that paid homage and remembrance to the God who rescued their ancestors from the bondage of slavery in Egypt centuries before would thwart this chance.

The religious mob was assembled and led to the garden by Judas, who would give the sign by a kiss. Judas' gesture would sting the cheek of the Savior in ways that never could be imagined. Matthew's gospel records the scene.

“While he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a great crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, “The one I will kiss is the man; seize him.” And he came up to Jesus at once and said, “Greetings, Rabbi!” And he kissed him. Jesus said to him, “Friend, do what you came to do.” Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and seized him. And behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword and struck the servant[b] of the high priest and cut off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, “Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?” At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, “Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. But all this has taken place that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.” Then all the disciples left him and fled.” Matthew 26:47-56

Somewhere in the chaos of the night, the darkness of Maundy Thursday turned to the morning hours of Good Friday. A back and forth took place throughout the hours after the garden arrest as an unlawful trial of botched Jewish legal procedure unfolded around Jesus. Thirty silver coins had been paid to Judas in exchange for turning over the One who had caused so much commotion within the Jewish religious system. The One who had triggered so many to see things from a new and right-side-up point of view had been bought and paid for by blood money. The religious leaders were doing all they could to keep things upside down with their power and control remaining on top of things. Judas soon would come to his senses and realize his actions were filled with regret and “sellers” remorse. Matthew continues the story.

“When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death. And they bound him and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate the governor. Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, saying, “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.” They said, “What is that to us? See to it yourself.” And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself.” Matthew 27:1-5

Such a sad and morbid ending to one who held so much promise when Jesus first called him to follow Him as one of the Twelve. But Judas never could get the right perspective and proper expectations of who Jesus was as the true Messiah of Israel. Judas was one who was as close to Jesus in proximity as any who walked on the earth with Him. However, nearness to Jesus does not ensure life change from the inside out. One can walk with Jesus and not have their life turned right-side-up as God intended. Judas is proof that just because one associates with Jesus does not mean that a person’s life has been changed for eternity by salvation from Jesus. To compound matters for Judas, instead of finding freedom in repentance once he understood what he had done, he instead chose to wallow in regret to the point that it suffocated his life before the noose around his neck ever did.

Good Friday was a bad day for Judas. He died at his own hand as he swung from a rope tied to a tree branch. Judas took his own life. However, no one took Jesus’ life later that same day. Instead, Jesus laid down His life on the cross so that all who might call on His name could receive what Judas never did: forgiveness from their sins. Just hours earlier, Jesus told the remaining eleven disciples what the greatest demonstration of love looked like in action.

“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command.” John 15:13-14

Judas went his own way, and it cost him death eternal. Jesus did the will of the Father and what He came from Heaven to earth to do; it gained all who call on Jesus’ name to be saved from their sins life eternal. May see clearly who Jesus the Messiah truly is as we seize the great expectations of eternal life that are produced from the cross. May we not miss the opportunity to find forgiveness of our sins in the sacrificial death of Jesus. This is what makes Good Friday so glorious for all who call on the name of the Lord Jesus to be saved. This is what makes us friends with holy God.