

Judas – Son of Perdition

Four at the Crossroad:

John 17:12-19

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Every one of us faces pivotal moments: a crossroad or crossroads down which a destiny lies. Who do I wed? What school will I attend? What job shall I pursue? Those are obvious roads. Sometimes, however, the choice doesn't look like a road. The choice of "yes" for a date or "yes" for a ride in a car can result in ends we never imagined.

That was clearly true for four men: Judas, Pilate, Peter and Jesus. Each made decisions that defined their destiny. They all encountered the same cross, but the choices they made and the paths they took ended differently. We'll examine their decisions over the next month and the consequences, and we will then see better the crossroad we face.

Let's first consider Judas. About the other disciples and him Jesus prayed:

While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name which You have given Me; and I guarded them and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled. (John 17:12, NASU)

Jesus referred to Judas as *the son of perdition*. This is not the first time Jesus used such strong language. Earlier he confronted some religious leaders, saying:

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are. (Matthew 23:15, NIV)

Jesus saw men of faith mentoring people into religious behavior that fulfilled hell's designs.

Their followers would learn to oppose the work and will of God. It wasn't atheists that Jesus called sons of hell. It was religious activists. I see this very thing in the religious right and the religious left. There is a self-righteous, judging spirit that frustrates the will of God and harms

the people of God. It is not wrong to be politically active or passionate. It is not wrong to be convinced of a biblical truth. However, a self-righteous spirit opposes God's redeeming work on earth. That, however, was not what Jesus said about Judas. He did not call him a son of hell. He referred to Judas as *the son of perdition*.

Perdition speaks of ultimate destruction. *Son of perdition* is a title. Our pew Bible translates it "***the one headed for destruction.***" The most popular English Bible reads "***the one doomed to destruction.***" The concept was that Judas was born for *the* destruction, hell.

You might ask, where is the grace, where is the mercy in this prayer? It sounds like Judas was born for destruction and had no choice. It sounds like Jesus wrote him off. If you make that judgment, you slice the Bible into exceedingly thin pieces so that you can pick out parts and judge them. If you did that with George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Jr. or William Wilburforce, who eradicated slavery in the British Commonwealth, you'd judge them all failures. It is only when you see their word and work in totality that you understand them. In the same way, it is not helpful to separate Jesus' words, *the son of perdition* from his other teachings that hold us responsible for our actions.

Judas walked a path of his choosing, much like recently deceased Anna Nicole Smith, who, if some affidavits are even half-true, was inwardly tortured. Judas took a path that led to inward torture and outward destruction. Now, he did not choose his parents, language, physical features, nationality, or the time when he lived. Anna may have chosen a few of her physical features; however, neither chose some relationships and opportunities that intersected their path.

It was Jesus who selected Judas to be with him as one of his twelve most trusted disciples. Judas got to see and do things that many devout people could not imagine. Judas walked with Jesus and tasted his love. Judas observed the power of Jesus. In many ways, Judas

was more religious, more devout and more fruitful in his faith than most of us. He gave much more attention to Jesus' teaching, work and mission than most of us. He left his livelihood to accompany Jesus. Indeed, how could you become one of the Twelve and also their treasurer unless you gained their confidence? Judas was not *the son of perdition* because God hated him. Judas received that title because he ignored God's crossroad of salvation and walked a hidden, deceptive course that led to destruction. He walked a path of greed so that lust of money made him dishonest. Concealing his sins, he was led by pride and fear. He accompanied Jesus and his companions doing "kingdom work" but walked secretly with these attitudes and actions.

Jesus' prayer made it clear that Judas wasn't first won and then lost. Since he harbored and hid sinful thoughts and deeds, he never took the path of repentance and faith. He never tasted God's mercy and freedom. When we conceal our sins, we walk a path where the cross is a witness against us like Judas rather than a witness for us. The cross that is pinned in our ears, hung around our neck or affixed to the wall carries no forgiveness or power, for we take Judas' path rather the road of repentance and faith.

The moment of clarity took place in Bethany. Ironic, isn't it? After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, two grateful sisters gave a banquet in Jesus' honor. In an act of extravagant devotion, Mary took a jar of expensive perfume and poured it on Jesus' feet. She wiped the perfume off with her hair. The house filled with fragrance. The act could not be ignored. The perfume cost roughly \$70,000, in terms of the living standard in northwest Rochester. Matthew writes that the Twelve were angry about this. They all thought it could be used better. We read:

Then one of the Twelve-the one called Judas Iscariot-went to the chief priests and asked, "What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?" So they counted out for him thirty silver coins. From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over. (Matthew 26:14-16, NIV)

Judas did hand Jesus over. Jesus was executed as a result. Judas threw those silver coins back at the religious leaders who paid him; and in despair and guilt, he took his life. He never knew the victory that repentance and faith brings. He never took the crossroad of life that God extended to him. He never knew what grace can do for a broken, darkened heart.

God intersected his path with a crossroad of life, and God has done that with you and me. You cannot walk the path of life concealing your life-problems. Truly, you don't have a worry-problem, a drinking-problem, a spending problem, a lust-problem or a weight-problem. You and I have life-problems that result in destruction. You and I have a God-problem, where we are alienated from our source of life and freedom. Unless we deal with our God problem, unless we, in steps of repentance and faith, walk the crossroad extended to us by Christ, we miss the great salvation promised in the gospel of Christ. Repentance and faith are a road rather than a choice.

Repentance puts you before Christ and his ambassadors confessing and renouncing your secret, besetting sins. Faith moves you to action and into a new understanding where you believe and implement what Christ taught.

In contrast to Judas, we find in the nineteenth chapter of Luke that very thing with the tax collector Zacchæus, who openly acknowledged his greed and publicly renounced it. Moreover, he made restitution to those he stole from. That is confession and repentance. The Lord's forgiveness meant more than the approval of others. The reward of this path was not only a clean conscience, but a clean heart and life.

That is what Christ came to give you and me. You and I are not to follow Judas in concealing our secret struggles and shame. We are not to withhold forgiveness and harbor bitterness, for then the cross is a witness against us. Then we follow the road of Judas who erupted in betrayal and rebellion when he could not understand an act of faith and love.