

Sent Ones: Judas Iscariot – Worst of All Time

From the Series, “The King and I – Matthew Tells Us About the King of the Universe”

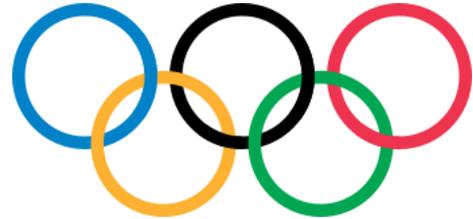
By Phil Brainerd

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Introduction

Right now, we’re in the middle of the Winter Olympics. The Olympics, whether Winter or Summer, are always the symbols of achievement - The best athletes in the world gather to compete to see who’s the best.



If you win, you get a gold medal. But wait! Does getting a gold medal at the Olympics mean that you’re the best? Well, you’re the best at that moment, of course. But, getting the gold medal, as good as that is, brings up the next question: ***Who is the greatest of all time?***

This one is hard because there are lots of sports. If you’re in the Winter games, are you looking for the greatest figure skater? Or are you looking for the greatest skier? If you’re in the Summer games, are you looking for the greatest runner? And if you want the greatest runner, do you mean the greatest sprinter, or the greatest marathoner? There’s a long list of sports out there.

Sports can be very inspirational, but here’s another question: Could you look for something more general? Is there a way to find the greatest ***person*** of all time? If so, how would you measure that? Is it the smartest? Are you looking for a scientist? The most successful? Are you looking for a business leader? Are you looking for the richest person in the world? Maybe someone like Bill Gates or Elon Musk? Are you looking for the kindest person? Maybe Mother Theresa would be the choice?

We’re in our series, “The King and I – Matthew Tells Us About the King of the Universe.” We’re working our way through Matthew’s book about the life of Jesus Christ. A while back, we started a sub-series, “Sent Ones.” Jesus wanted to send the most important message ever heard into the world: His gospel. He chose twelve men to do it. We’ve been meeting them in the last few sessions. So far, we’ve met:

- Peter and his brother Andrew,
- James the son of Zebedee and his brother John,
- Philip and his good friend, Bartholomew;
- Thomas and Matthew the tax collector;
- James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus; and Simon the Zealot.

If you were to ask the question, “Who are the greatest people of all time”, maybe these names should come up? These men are responsible for the Gospel of Jesus Christ being sent out into the world. Most of them gave their lives so that others could hear the message of salvation.

At this point, you may have noticed there is one man we haven’t covered yet: Judas Iscariot. And so, at this point, the tone of our discussion changes. Until now, we’ve been asking about individuals who represent the greatest of all time - Whether sports or something else.

Now, we change gears. Judas Iscariot was a man who had the rare, rare privilege of serving with the twelve men that Jesus chose as his “sent ones”. However, he brings up the opposite question: ***Is there a worst of all time?***

Oddly, when you ask questions about candidates for best persons of all time and worst persons of all time, some of the candidates appear in Matthew’s book. For the greatest: We’ve met eleven out of the twelve apostles. For the worst: As we study together, we’ll meet people like King Herod, Pontius Pilate, and the religious leaders of ancient Israel.

We met King Herod early in our series. He was so evil, he called for the murder of all the children in Bethlehem under the age of two years old. He was afraid that one of them might be the true king of Israel, and that the true king might take away his throne. We mentioned some of his other crimes at that time. That certainly makes him a candidate for worst of all time.

However, we’re going to learn today that there is good reason to believe that Judas surpasses Herod. Let’s find out why. Why has Judas Iscariot has earned this title?

I. Judas betrayed Jesus.

The first thing we learn is that Judas betrayed Jesus. Matthew presents a list of the twelve apostles in chapter 10 of his book. Let’s look at it again:

2 These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; 3 Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; 4 Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. (Matthew 10:2-4)

Of the names listed, there are only two that give us specific information. We learned last week that Matthew specifically wanted us to know that he was a tax collector. Tax collectors were a hated and despised group of people. We learned last week that Matthew wants us to know that he was a terrible person - But he was a terrible person who was forgiven by Jesus. Because of this, Matthew is a highlight of something we’ve learned about all the apostles: They were all something less than perfect. They all had flaws. The fact that they had flaws doesn’t mean that

they had no strengths, but they all had character problems that could have disqualified them. However, Jesus forgave them. These men chose to spend time with Jesus, and because of that, they were eventually changed. They were changed into men who could boldly travel out into all areas of the known world of that day to share the gospel of Christ.

We've heard that several times in our series: From that, we've learned an important principle:

***Jesus doesn't call people
based on their earthly gifts and accomplishments.
Jesus calls people
based on what they can become
if they will give themselves over to him.***

This group of very imperfect men gave themselves to Jesus. Because of that, they were changed.

The only other name on the list that provides information is Judas. There we learn that he betrayed Jesus. How did that happen? The apostles were a group of men who had flaws, but they were changed for the better after meeting Jesus. Judas was a man who, no doubt, started with flaws. However, after meeting Jesus, he either didn't change, or he changed for the worse.

There is a saying: "The same sun that softens the wax hardens the clay." In Judas, we have a tragic irony. The other apostles had flaws, and Judas had flaws. The other apostles spent considerable time with Jesus, and Judas spent considerable time with Jesus. The other apostles saw miracles, and Judas saw miracles. Judas was given all the same gifts and privileges that the other apostles had, and yet he did not benefit from all that.

So, there an important principle here: ***At some point, you must choose.***

- You must choose to let Jesus in.
- You must choose to let Jesus shine the light on your sin.
- You must choose to repent of your sin.
- You must choose to let Jesus be your Lord and Master.

If you don't make that choice, you can be exposed to Jesus for years and still not be changed.

This is very important. All of us share the qualities of the apostles. We're all human, which means we all have flaws. We all have sins. None of us are better than the apostles. We can choose to respond to Jesus well, or we can choose to respond poorly. We must choose.

So, the first thing that qualifies Judas for worst of all time is the fact that he betrayed Jesus. Jesus showed Judas all the kindness and privilege that he showed to others, yet Judas did not change for the better.

II. Judas betrayed Jesus for selfish reasons.

Something else we need to consider about Judas is his motivation - He betrayed Jesus for selfish reasons. Let's read something Jesus said about him:

70 Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you, the twelve? And yet one of you is a devil." 71 He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray him. (John 6:70-71)

Jesus chose twelve men. One of them, however, was different. Jesus referred to that one as "a devil." And to make the point painfully clear, the writer makes a specific reference to Judas Iscariot. And here's an important note: Jesus said this probably a year before Judas performed his act of betrayal.

Usually, in the Bible, a "devil" is an evil, supernatural being. In this case though, I think that what Jesus is saying is that he knows how Judas will choose, and he knows why. Judas is going to do something evil. And he's going to make his decision for selfish, evil reasons.

This is important because of different ways that some people portray Judas. In 1971, theatergoers first saw the Broadway musical, "Jesus Christ, Superstar". In that play, Judas is portrayed as a sympathetic person. He's loyal to Jesus, but at some point, he comes to believe that Jesus is not the Messiah. In fact, he comes to believe that Jesus is a misguided person, maybe even mentally ill. Those who follow my writing know that I consider this view to be impossible if you've truly studied the life of Christ. However, these types of ideas exist anyway. Following this line of thought, Judas arrives at the following rationalization: If Jesus is allowed to keep gathering crowds, the Romans might get upset, and then they'll come in and kill a lot of people. And so, Judas turns Jesus over to the authorities.

In this way of thinking, Judas is a kind of patriot. He's removing Jesus from the spotlight so everyone can be safe. His only regret is that Jesus winds up being executed.

To this way of thinking, Jesus says, "no." Judas is going to do something evil, and he's going to do it for evil, selfish reasons.

What were those evil, selfish reasons?

III. Judas loved money, comfort, and power.

We're going to find that Judas loved money, comfort, and power. Let's read the only time he is quoted in the Bible:

12 Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. 2 Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. 3 Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. (John 12:1-3)

You may recall that, in an earlier session, we talked about Jesus coming to Bethany. It was a suburb of Jerusalem. Jesus had visited this town previously, and people there got so mad they tried to have him stoned. His disciples tried to dissuade Jesus from ever going there again, but Jesus insisted. Once they got there, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead.

In appreciation, Lazarus and his family had Jesus and his followers over for dinner. This is a whole sermon in itself, so we'll stick to the main points. Mary, who is also very grateful to Jesus, opened a vile of perfume called "nard", and poured it over Jesus' head. It's a very strong perfume, so the fragrance filled the whole room. How did Judas react?

4 But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, 5 "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." (vs 4-5)

To many people, this sounds like a reasonable response. We all care about the poor, right? Someone opened a luxury item, a very expensive perfume, and used it all up in one shot. What a shame! That money could have been used to help people in need. This story is told in the other gospel accounts as well - In each case, all the disciples are on board.

But, is that the whole picture?

6 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. (v 6)

Ah. That changes things, doesn't it? This tells us a few things about Judas. Let me illustrate: If someone were to open a bottle of very expensive perfume around me, you know what I'd say? I'd say, "Gee, that smells good. What is that?" At least, I hope that's what I'd say. It's possible that if someone were to open a very fine perfume near me that I'd say, "Hey, that smells awful. Someone open a window!"

The point is, I don't know the name brands of perfumes that cost thousands of dollars. But apparently, Judas did. When someone opened a bottle of the most expensive perfume you could buy, Judas said, "Hey – That's *nard*. Who opened a bottle of nard?"

From this, we can see that Judas knew about the high life. Judas knew all about expensive things. Somewhere along the line, Judas had been exposed to expensive living. And he liked it.

For three years, he had been wandering around in the open, sleeping on the ground under trees, and eating whatever people served. Apparently, it got to him. He felt that he deserved better. So, he got into the bad habit of pilfering from the money box. We don't know what he bought with the money he stole, but apparently it was nice things - better things than Jesus and the other apostles were living with.

If we do a little detective work, we learn more. Over in Matthew we see the same story. Matthew highlights a few different details. Here's how Jesus responded to all this:

10 Aware of this, Jesus said to them, "Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. 11 The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me. 12 When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. 13 Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her." (Matthew 12:10-13)

Again, this is a whole sermon. For now, let's just say that when Jesus hears how Mary is being criticized, he shuts everyone down. Look at what happens next:

14 Then one of the Twelve—the one called Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priests 15 and asked, "What are you willing to give me if I deliver him over to you?" So they counted out for him thirty pieces of silver. 16 From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over. (vs 14-16)

Here we see the motivation of Judas. He loved money and comfort. It may be that he saw Jesus as the Messiah. But to him, the Messiah was someone who would become powerful in politics, which would lead to the high life. If you hang around with the King, it follows that you eventually live in a palace, right? But now, it looks like that's not going to happen. In fact, maybe Judas is about to be caught, literally with his fingers in the money chest. So, now it's time to cash in. It's time to head over to the authorities and collect whatever reward money he can get. It's time for Judas to turn Jesus in.

It's hard to determine exactly what thirty pieces of silver could buy today, but many who have run the numbers say it's not really that much. So, Judas loved money and power. That led him to betray the Savior of the world for a bargain price. From all this, we see the motivation of Judas.

Even worse were the methods he used.

IV. Judas was deceitful.

Judas used deceit - A lot of deceit. While it's in our memory, let's look again at the passage we just read. Judas made his decision to betray Jesus. He gets his money. Now watch what happens.

From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over. (Matthew 12:16)

So, this was not an impulse decision - This was carefully planned. The religious leadership wanted Jesus gone. However, they were all cowards. They were afraid that, if they arrested Jesus when there were crowds around there could be trouble. There could be an uprising. So, they wanted to find Jesus when he was alone or close to alone. That's where Judas comes in. He agrees to watch for an opportune time.

What is this going to involve? It's going to involve Judas going back to Jesus and his disciples. It's going to involve Judas acting like he's still everyone's friend. It's going to involve deceit - And a lot of it. It's going to involve Judas looking everyone straight in the face and lying to them.

For most people, lying is hard. If you lie for a long time, you might start to get nervous. People might start asking questions. Why does Judas think he can do this? Why does he think he can get away with this? ***Because he's already been doing it.***

We read earlier that Judas was in the habit of pilfering from the money box. No one had any idea. There was apparently nothing about Judas that would make anyone suspicious. Hey, he was put in charge of all the money - You don't do that with suspicious people.

During the last meeting that Jesus had with his followers, also known as the "Last Supper", Jesus predicted that he would be betrayed.

20 When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve. 21 And while they were eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me."
(Matthew 26:20-21)

Look at the reaction of the disciples:

22 They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, "Surely you don't mean me, Lord?" (v 22)

Judas had spent three years with the disciples. He made the decision to betray Jesus days before. Not one of the disciples suspected him. Judas was deceitful. And he was very good at it. He had been doing it for a while.

Now, think about this:

“Why wasn’t this perfume sold and the money given to the poor?” (John 12:5)

Look at this grandstanding. What kind of a man could tell people he was concerned about the poor, when in fact he was pilfering from the money box? And what kind of man could do this to Jesus and his apostles? Answer: A very deceitful man, that’s who.

So, one of the reasons Judas goes down in history as the worst of all time, was his ability to use deceit to hurt people.

V. His Death

We cannot discuss Judas Iscariot without mentioning the way he died.

3 When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. 4 “I have sinned,” he said, “for I have betrayed innocent blood.” “What is that to us?” they replied. “That’s your responsibility.” 5 So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself. (Matthew 27:3-5)

How Tragic! Like many self-centered people, Judas failed to think about the ramifications of his actions. He seemed to be under the impression that Jesus would be imprisoned and later released. Knowing what happened with John the Baptist, Judas should have at least considered that Jesus would be condemned to death.

When Judas saw the full impact of what he did, we’re told he felt remorse. Sadly, there is a big difference between remorse and repentance. Remorse says, “I did something that was unprofitable, and I feel really bad about it.” Remorse says, “I’m in big trouble.” Remorse says, “There’s something I can do to pay for my sin.” In the case of Judas, it meant returning the thirty pieces of silver. When that didn’t work, Judas hanged himself.

Repentance says, “I did something evil, and I must seek God’s forgiveness.”

VI. What does this mean for us today?

So, what does this mean for us today? First, let’s answer the question of why Judas is thrown in with the worst people of all time. At first, doing that may seem unfair. Judas was deceitful. But then, lots of people are deceitful. Because of what Judas did, someone died. However, lots of people fail to fully consider the results of their actions. And yes, sometimes that means people die.

But think about what ***might*** have happened. Before the foundation of the world, Jesus knew that he would have to die for the sins of the world. What might have happened if he was anything less than God visiting the face of the earth? What if it were possible for mortals to stand in his way? What if Judas had actually succeeded in stopping Jesus from carrying out his mission? If that had happened, no one would be able to receive salvation for their sins. Billions of people would be lost. Fortunately, for all of us, it was not possible for humans to stand in the way of God's plan. But, one poor misguided man gave it a try.

Others tried. We mentioned Herod – he killed children in the quest to stop the Son of Man from taking his throne. But then, Herod never met Jesus. Judas spent three years with Jesus. He watched miracles that the rest of us could only dream of seeing. More than that, he sat at the feet of Jesus and enjoyed his teaching. He fellowshipped directly with the Son of God, and with all his disciples. Jesus showed him respect and love.

And yet, Judas allowed his love of money, comfort and power to overwhelm him. Whereas the other apostles were changed from flawed men to great men, Judas descended to an evil man. A man who deceived all his friends. A man who was so blind he missed the Savior of the world and betrayed him for a small sum.

What does that mean for us today? More than anything, we take warning. None of us are better than Judas. We are made of the same stuff. We must all allow Jesus into our hearts to change us.

We must be very, very careful of the seductions of sin. Once we get into the habit of deceiving people, it's hard to stop.

And sadly, we're all vulnerable to deception from others. If Judas could deceive the other twelve apostles into trusting him with the money box, then we too must be on the watch. The world is full of deceivers, and we are not better than the twelve.

We must also think before we act - Sometimes our failings can hurt others. We must be on the watch against sin. Not just because it's wrong, but because of the effects it has on our world.

Finally, the story of Judas teaches us to be on the watch. Watch for your heart. If you fail, you may be surprised how close you can be to the worst of all. If you invite Jesus in, he might change you so much that you could be among the best. So, invite Jesus in – today!

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www.TrinityTeaneck.org

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PhilBrainerd.com

To learn how to begin a new life with Jesus Christ, visit Billy Graham's site:
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