

Sermon for Sunday, July 7, 1974 by Andrew A. Jumper, D. D., Pastor
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"THE JUDAS IN YOUR HEART"

St. Matthew 26:14-29

St. Matthew 27:1-5

Text: "Judas, who betrayed him, said, 'Is it I, Master?'" St. Matthew 26:25a

My name is Judas--Judas Iscariot. I followed Jesus as he traveled from place to place. From the first I had thought that he was the Messiah sent from God--the anointed one--but as time passed and he made no effort to organize the people in revolt, I began to wonder what sort of Messiah he was turning out to be. I had thought the Messiah would be one who would organize the people of God and throw off the yoke of Roman bondage but He kept talking about some suffering servant. I can't begin to tell you what was in my mind that day that I finally decided to betray Jesus to the Jewish rulers. I am sure you have had the same experience. Sometimes you decide to do something but looking back you can't really make up your mind why you did it. In a way I was trying to force his hand--if he were truly the Messiah he would never let the Jewish people destroy him and he would have to demonstrate his powers to overcome them. You see, I was trying to force him to show his colors. Then on the other hand, perhaps I had given up any hope that he would ever lead our people to victory and reestablish the kingdom of God on earth. Perhaps I had given up and was only trying to salvage what I could for myself. I had invested three years in this man and I had nothing to show for it. My mind was all confused and it is difficult for me to know just what my motives were--I only know I had to end the doubt and uncertainty in my own mind about Jesus. Thus it was that I decided to betray him into the hands of those who hated him--one way or the other, the whole thing was going to end. I had made up my mind, so I went to the chief priests and bargained with them. We finally agreed on a price of thirty pieces of silver, the price of a common slave. From that moment on there was to be no happiness in my life, but only doubt and fear and torment and self-loathing.

It was time to celebrate the feast of the passover. Hundreds of years before God had taken Moses and had led our people out of slavery in Egypt. So we celebrated the feast of the passover to commemorate that event. It was the yearly celebration and the disciples had a room upstairs in the home of a friend. We had all gathered around the table together. The disciples and Jesus talked quietly but I sat silently watching the faces of the men with whom I had been associated over the past three years--there was Peter, a big, rough fisherman, quick to make decisions, just as quick to regret them; quiet Andrew, overshadowed by his brother, yet with a tenderness about his face. He was always bringing people to meet Jesus; James and John--these two had been especially close to Jesus, but they were fiery tempered and we called them "Son of Thunder"; somewhat self-centered and seeking the first place even if they had to ask their mother to talk to Jesus about it, quick to judge and eager to do away with those who did not agree with them. There was Thomas--always logical and consistent in his ways, always asking for proof of things; Philip, the eager evangelist, always running to tell others about Jesus--Bartholomew, Matthew, Thaddeus, Simon, James the son of Alpheus--my eyes roved over all of their faces that night and I thought of the many happy hours, the many experiences, that we had shared together. I wondered what they would think of me if they knew that I had betrayed Jesus to the Priests? It had been a good three years, but it could not last forever. Already there was much opposition to Jesus and many of those who had believed in him at first were now beginning to doubt. I felt I was doing the right thing, for if Jesus were the Messiah he would have to prove himself, and if he were not, then this farce would end.

Many thoughts ran through my mind that night as we sat around the table. Suddenly

Jesus held up his hand for silence and said, "One of you shall betray me." My heart began to pound and I could hardly get my breath--Jesus knew! Somehow, someway, he had found out about my deceit and he knew that I had sold him to the Jews. The disciples were astounded at what Jesus said and looked at one another in amazement--I had to make sure and in the midst of the noisy, excited talk of the disciples I grasped Jesus by the arm and asked him, "Master, is it I?" He turned and looked at me--his eyes bored into mine--I wanted to look away but I could not--there was no hate in his eyes, only pity; no scorn on his face, but only compassion and sorrow. His lips barely moved, but to me his whispered words lashed like a whip across my heart--"Thou hast said."

I wanted to get up and run out of there, but I was too weak to move. Almost in a trance I watched Jesus as he took bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to his disciples, "This is my body, broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And then he took a cup of wine and passed it among us, "This is my blood shed for you. Do this in remembrance of me." Then he looked across at me and said, "What thou doest, do quickly." The other disciples thought he was sending me on some errand, but he knew--and I knew.

Well, you know what happened next. I knew they were going to the Garden of Gethsemane. They had planned to go there to pray awhile and so I took the soldiers and led them there and when I saw Jesus, I went up to him and greeted him and I kissed him on the cheek as we had always done. That was the signal to the soldiers that this was their man and so they took him captive.

The disciples of Jesus had fled and the soldiers had led Jesus off to be tried. I was left alone there in the Garden. After the noise of the shouting mob, the Garden was strangely quiet. The stars were out and the moon washed the whole Garden in a pale light. My soul felt strangely dead within me and my heart was heavy. Now that the excitement was over, I felt emotionally drained and sat down beneath a tree to rest. I tried to close my mind to what I had done, but like the faint breeze that rustled the leaves over my head, the words of Jesus whispered through my heart, "Remember me, remember me."

Oh, yes--I remembered him--I remembered him as I had seen him in the midst of a group of happy, shouting children, his face smiling, his hands reaching out to bless them. I remembered him as he stopped beside some crippled beggar, and lovingly raised him to his feet--his fingers touching blind eyes, his feet turning aside to give a word of encouragement, a word of hope, a word of love. I remember the multitudes looking up at him with their faces rapt in attention because as he talked about the kingdom of God, suddenly they understood and their hearts were thrilled and you could see it in their faces. I remember the quiet talks together as we walked from place to place. He taught us so much. I didn't realize it then. I remembered the companionship of meals shared together, of sleeping side by side under the open sky. There was so much that I remembered, so many happy hours of fellowship, so many wonderful miracles of healing--always there had been a quiet dignity about him, a love, a compassion, a sympathy, an understanding--but that was all over now. Faintly in the distance I could hear the roar of a gathering mob and it sounded as though they were headed for the palace of Pilate. I knew that Jesus was done for, the Jews would never let him get away alive--and then it suddenly hit me what I had done. I, Judas, had sold the Messiah into the hands of God's enemies. I could not stand the loneliness there in the Garden but my pocket full of silver was so heavy that it seemed to pin me to the ground and I couldn't move. I stayed there a long time that night.

By morning the crowds had gathered at the palace and I had gotten there and I stood on the edge of the crowd. I watched the mockery of that farce of a trial in which Jesus was condemned to die. When Pilate at last gave consent to the death of Jesus

a great roar went up from the blood thirsty crowd. I could stand it no longer--I felt physically ill. My head was pounding and it seemed hard to breathe. Self-loathing and revulsion swept over me for what I had done. I hunted out the men to whom I had sold my Lord and tried to get them to take the money back and release Jesus. I told them that I had made a mistake. I told them that I had betrayed innocent blood. They laughed at me and sneered at me and said that that was my problem and I threw the silver in their face and I ran out. The Bible tells you what I did--I killed myself. I knew I could never face myself again.

That night Jesus said, "This do in remembrance of me." You know, when I sat at that supper with Jesus there was betrayal in my heart. I meant to betray Jesus. As you come to His table this morning, what's in your heart? I betrayed him that night for a handful of silver. As you come to His table, what do you intend to do about Jesus? Do you really plan to love Him or is there some Judas this morning in your heart?