

# The Gospel According to Judas - The Sequel

By Rev Dr Brian Hooper

Judas was a man who allowed his fixation with position and money to so cloud his eyesight that he failed to see who Jesus was until it was too late. Then, because of what he had done, was so full of remorse that he hung himself and died at the end of a rope. I can't think of a sadder image in the New Testament than Judas; a man chosen to be a disciple of Jesus; a man who walked with Jesus and saw Him do miracles; and yet ended his life at the end of a rope and known through history as the betrayer of Jesus.

What stimulated my thinking about Judas was a letter I received from one of my professors at Fuller. During a visit to San Francisco, my Prof had ended going into a Men's Washroom. In the washroom there on the wall, written for all to see, was this message, "JUDAS, ALL IS FORGIVEN - COME HOME." It is one of those haunting images that just I just couldn't get out of my head. I found myself wondering what was behind the message. I could almost see a distraught father stopping in a washroom just as he was about to leave the city. You see, he had lost his teenaged son. One day in the midst some trouble, his son had just disappeared. For months there hadn't been a word and then his dad heard a rumor that his son was living off the streets in San Francisco as a male hooker. He was sick and in trouble, and so the father had left all and gone searching for his son. He had contacted the police and the street workers. He walked the streets night after night, checking out every bar and dive he could find, and found nothing. Finally, with time running out, completely discouraged, as he was leaving town he stopped at a washroom and left one last desperate message for his son. It simply said, "*JUDAS, ALL IS FORGIVEN. COME HOME*", and he signed it, "*YOUR DAD*".

Judas was on a journey which ended in despair. Judas felt he could never be forgiven because of what he had done, so he hung himself. The sad thing for me is that, despite losing all hope, I believe that Judas was ONLY A PRAYER AWAY FROM FORGIVENESS. I believe that if Jesus was to write a message on a wall for Judas, it would have been, "*JUDAS, ALL IS FORGIVEN - COME HOME.*"

Today I want to *chase three false ideas* that Judas had which led to his despair. They are fallacies that many of us also believe at times even though they are really lies, lies that need to be re-examined so they may be thrown away. In order to do that, I want to paint a picture - a 'WHAT IF' PICTURE for you. *What if ...* Jesus had met Judas on the cliff just as he was about to climb the tree? At that precise moment as he was about to slip the noose around his neck, as he was ready to plunge himself into eternity without Christ, as he turned around, there standing at the base of the tree was Jesus. You can imagine the awkward silence as Judas watched Jesus take in the scene in front of Him. WHAT do you think Jesus would have said to Judas in the midst of Judas' despair and remorse? I think the very first thing Jesus would have said would have been:

## **I. Judas, my choosing of you counts more than your betrayal of Me.**

I am sure Judas would have shaken his head, unable to even fathom what Jesus had just said. "*Judas, my choosing of you counts more than your betrayal of me.*" We can only begin to imagine what was going through Judas' mind, for he had just run away from the high priest's court, leaving his 30 pieces of silver lying there on the floor. He had just realized that he was about to have an innocent man's blood on his hands. And the Jesus he had betrayed was actually the Messiah for which Israel had

waited for centuries. We can only begin to *imagine* the voices that must have echoed through his mind as he remembered he had betrayed his friend Jesus with a kiss. He must have felt that what he had done was so heinous that nothing could possibly redeem him. As he prepared to throw himself off that cliff with a noose around his neck, *all he could see was that He had betrayed Jesus*, therefore THERE WAS NO HOPE.

Have you ever found yourself in a place like Judas, a place where you have become so busy with work/stuff/ life that you seem to have pushed Jesus completely out of your life? You feel like it is impossible for you to begin again after such a long absence from Him. Or maybe you have played with a particular sin or wrong passion and it is as if your heart betrays you by saying, *"You have gone too far this time. God can never accept you back."* Have you felt like Judas, that there is just no hope you could begin again, for all you can see is your separation for God and it seems it has become too large a gap to cross to get to Him.

Do you know how Jesus would respond? I believe it will be just the same as He would respond to Judas, *"Yes Judas, your sin was unforgivable. To walk with me and then betray me is unforgivable ... by anyone but Me. But instead of talking about what you have done, let me remind you of something you have forgotten. Three years ago on a hillside, during my Sermon on the Mount, with hundreds of people to choose from, I CHOSE YOU. I picked you out of a crowd. I picked you to be one of my disciples. I saw in you potential. I and the Father loved you enough that together we called you to be a part of the inner circle, to be a part of our Kingdom. JUDAS, I CHOSE YOU, AND I NEVER RENEGE ON MY LOVE AND MY PROMISES."*

You see, we have this idea that because we are sometimes FICKLE with our love toward God, that He will be fickle with His love toward us; that because we blow hot and cold with our commitment to Him, He will blow hot and cold with His love toward us. And we make the mistake of JUDGING GOD BY OUR OWN STANDARDS OF CONDUCT.

**Romans 11:29**, *"The gifts and the call of God are irrevocable"*- they won't be taken back. His promise is that His call on your life is forever.

**Romans 8:38, 39** *"For I am convinced that ..."* (John 14:16, 20; I John 5:10-14).

**John 10:28, 29**. The picture being portrayed here is that YOU AND I are *in* JESUS and He is *in* GOD, and once you are in the security of their grasp and their love, YOU ARE SAFE AND SECURE. THEY WON'T DROP YOU, THEY WON'T LET YOU GO.

Jesus would have told Judas, ***"Don't overestimate your power to cancel whom God has chosen."*** We must never forget that GOD has a DEPTH OF LOVE which WE WILL NEVER be able to UNDERSTAND, *and that means if Jesus stood below the tree on which Judas perched, He would have reminded him that His choosing of Judas counts more than Judas' betrayal, for Jesus' love is not fickle or quickly withdrawn.*

One day, D.L. Moody was preaching at a revival at the Colombian Exposition in Chicago. His text was, *"The Son of Man is come to seek and to save the lost."* Near the end of the sermon a little boy was brought to the platform, for he had been wandering around in the crowd and become lost. Moody picked up the scared little boy, showed him to the crowd and said, *"As afraid as he is, I'll bet his father is even more anxious to find him."* Just then a man with fear written across his face pushed through the crowd and in tears picked up his little boy and hugged him. Moody turned to the crowd and added, *"For years, your Heavenly Father has been following you. He is following you still. Will you come back home?"*

It is easy to feel like Judas, that our sin may be too great or our separation too long for God to accept us back. But if you listen, you will hear Jesus whisper, "*Yes the separation has been long and the sin may break my heart. But do you remember when I chose you, when I asked you to be my disciple? Things haven't changed on my part - I still love you and MY CHOOSING YOU COUNTS MORE THAN ANY BETRAYAL YOU MAY HAVE COMMITTED. JUDAS, YOU ARE FORGIVEN. COME ON HOME.*"

As Jesus stood beneath the tree and looked up at Judas, the second thing He would say was ...

## **II. Judas, your betrayal did not put me on the cross. I went to the cross on my own.**

I'm sure Judas would have said, "*But Lord, I put you on the cross. My scheming, my greed, my actions nailed you to the cross.*" But Jesus would have replied, "*That is only partially true. Judas, you have missed something. Long before you even contemplated your actions I had already begun walking toward the cross (Mark 8:31). I would have made it all the way to the cross without your help, for while you may have been a part of the process, I chose to go there on my own. Judas, at anytime I could have called 10,000 angels, but I chose to die alone for you and for others.*"

Could you have imagined what that would have meant to Judas? He felt His sin was so terrible; he believed the cross was all because of his actions. And he believed that HIS SIN WAS SO GREAT THAT FORGIVENESS WAS IMPOSSIBLE.

HAVE YOU EVER FELT THAT WAY? Have you felt that your actions, your sins, were so great that forgiveness was impossible? If you have, let me just tell you what you are saying: You are saying your sin is stronger than the power of God, your sin is stronger than the power of God's forgiveness; your sin is greater than His ability to forgive. That is a PRETTY COCKY STATEMENT. You are saying that although JESUS died for the sins of the whole world and although He was able to forgive all the sins of mankind on the cross, He isn't able to forgive the sins you have committed. That is exactly the LIE which Judas bought into 2,000 years ago. He was going to kill himself because His sins were so unique they were greater than God's power to forgive, for He believed his ACTIONS (and his alone) had put Jesus on the Cross.

And Jesus would have said, "*Judas, don't CLAIM by betrayal what I GAINED by love.*" For no matter what our sins may have been, they did not make Christ go to the cross. He went to the cross because He loved you and I, BECAUSE HE CHOSE TO GO out of love for YOU and I. And if He loved us that much, surely He will forgive us as we come back to Him. He died to forgive us, no matter what the sin.

Do you remember in school reading the book, "Les Miserables" by Victor Hugo? It is about Jean Valjean who was forced to be a galley slave for 19 years for stealing a loaf of bread for his sister's starving children. After his release, he asked to stay at a bishop's home for the night, where he was given supper and a bed. Jean rose early the next day and stole the bishop's silver plates. However, he was caught. When the police brought him back to the bishop's house to identify the stolen items, all the bishop said was, "*Why have you brought him back? I gave them to him. And Jean, by the way, you forgot to take the candle sticks as well.*" Jean had thought he had done the unpardonable, he had stolen from a priest. Instead, what he received was a forgiveness that went beyond his ability to understand it. Jean was so overcome with the kindness of the man that he found God and his life was completely changed.

Judas believed like we often do, that our sins are so terrible, that they are outside of the realm of God's forgiveness. It is as if God looked at our sin and said, "*Uh oh, I've never seen that sin in all of the history of mankind. I wonder if I have the power to forgive that sin?*" That is when we need to hear Jesus at the foot of the tree saying, "*Judas, I went to the cross on my own out of love for you. JUDAS COME HOME - ALL IS FORGIVEN.*"

### **III. The point of my death is to give you a life beyond what you think you deserve.**

The saddest thing about the story of Judas is that he was always just an inch away > a prayer away > from forgiveness and a new life. He was just three days away from meeting the Risen Christ; fifty away from Pentecost where would have become part of a task force that turned the world upside down, allowing him to experience a life far beyond anything he could have dreamed about.

What else would Jesus have said to Judas? "*Judas, I died so you could really experience TRUE life, so you could begin again, for the whole point of my death on the cross was to MAKE NEW BEGINNINGS POSSIBLE so you could experience a life that would go so far beyond what you think you deserve having.*"

The lines the devil used on Judas are the same ones he uses today:

- 1) Because of what we have done, how can we even call yourself a Christians?
- 2) Because at times we feel hypocritical, how can we go to church or ask God to forgive us?
- 3) Thus, until we get our act ALL together, God won't forgive or love us.

And so we stay miserable, just inches away from forgiveness or just a prayer away from confessing our sin and getting back on the path to happiness in our life and victory in our spirits. Then, if we finally ask Christ to forgive us, the devil's ultimate strategy is to try to cause us to *live as if our past deeds negate any of our future possibilities*. If we do that, we are living our lives based on what we would expect to happen if Jesus never died and rose again.

We sit like Judas as he sat ready to place the rope around his neck; like Peter as he heard the rooster crow for the third time, or like Thomas who thought about his colossal lack of faith and said, "*Look at how I keep messing up areas if my life.*" If that is who I am, then I had better be willing to settle for a pretty mediocre Christian life full of No- miracles, no whispering voices from God, no supernatural, and to be honest very little joy and fresh touches from God, for in me is so little good/ so little potential/ so little that the Lord needs.

It is then we need to look down from the tree and hear our Jesus say, "*Judas/ Peter/ Thomas/ David, don't you dare to talk about the person I went all the way to the cross to save/ the person I risked no, gave my life to change.*" And Jesus says, "*Please look again through my eyes at the person I chose/ the person I decided to walk to the cross for. You are beautiful in my eyes/ you have potential far beyond anything you can imagine or hope for. And by the way, I want to place in you my very own spirit so we can walk together, talk together, and change your life and the lives of others around You.*"

"*Judas please come home. I have a new life for you which will go far beyond you wildest hope that will begin as you ask for forgiveness. All can be forgiven and if you will let me, I will give a you life worth living.*"

A teacher wrote this ...

A NEW LEAF

He came to my desk with quivering lips --- the lesson was done.

"Dear Teacher, I want a new leaf, he said, I spoiled this one."

I took the old leaf, stained and blotted, and gave him a new one all unspotted

And into his sad eyes came a smile, "Do better, now, my child."

I went to the throne with a quivering soul --- the old year was done.

"Dear Father, have you a new leaf for me? I have spoiled this one."

He took the old leaf, stained and blotted, and gave me a new one all unspotted

And into my sad heart he smiled, "Do better, now, my child."

As Jesus looked up into the tree, he told Judas three things we need to still here today as we struggle as Christians who sin and disappointing God:

1. His choosing you counts more than your betrayal of Him.
2. Our betrayals did not put Him on the cross, He went His own out of love for us.
3. The point of His death was to give you a life that went beyond what you think you deserve, so live up to your calling in Jesus.

One the wall of your life is written, "**Judas, come home. All is forgiven**".

And it is signed by Jesus, and by Father God.