

Lessons from Judas' Death

Matthew is the only one of the gospels that chronicles the end of Judas' life. I'm not at all sure why Mark, Luke, or John do not cover this aspect of the story, but would imagine that his death is not the focal point of their efforts. Perhaps Matthew does so to provide a clear contrast between the death of Judas (remorseful cowardice) and that of Jesus (resolute obedience)- but such is only speculative. It is also possible that Matthew sought to compare the *godly sorrow* and *true repentance* of Peter with the *sorrow of the world* and *deadly cowardice* of Judas- but this, too, is hypothetical. But since Matthew did include the event, surely there are lessons to be learned. Let's consider a few things that can, and should, be learned.

The Background.

- Jesus, knew "*from the beginning*" who would betray Him, but picked Judas to be one of *the twelve* anyway, cp. John 6:64; Matt.10:1-4. Peter would later say that Judas "*was counted among us, and received his portion in this ministry,*" Acts 1:17. Thus, Jesus did not make him a "junior disciple," or say or do anything to indicate to the other disciples to *isolate* him. Nor did Jesus in any way diminish his role or responsibility despite knowing that he would ultimately be the betrayer. Judas made his own choices.
- Judas was given a responsible position among the disciples. He had charge of *the money box*, John 13:29.
- But we also learn that there was something amiss in the heart of Judas. He took advantage of the trust and position that had been given him by *pilfering* (stealing) from the funds over which he had been given charge, John 12:1-6. Jesus had given him subtle opportunities early on to change, cf. John 6:70-71, but these were not heeded.
- Perhaps Judas took offense at the rebuke of Jesus in Matt.26:10-13 personally (as he should because of a *guilty conscience*). John 12:5-6 indicate Judas proffered the objection, and was thus the primary object of the rebuke. Matt.26:14-16 seems to connect the rebuke by Jesus with Judas going to the chief priests in order to betray Him.
- Thus, with payment made in advance, v.15, Judas began to seek opportunities to betray Him, v.16.
- The *final straw*- surely in the mind of Judas at least, was Jesus identifying him to the eleven other disciples, vv.20-25. However, note that Judas *played along* right up the end, v.25!
- So, while Jesus took Peter, James, and John apart from the others with Him to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane (vv.36-46), Judas slinked off to do the deed and returned with the mob to betray the Savior, vv.47-50.
- The rest, as they say, is history. Jesus was taken, beaten, condemned, and crucified. But such is the not the end of Judas' story.
- Let's read Matt.27:1-10.

This is a sad ending to a life filled with tremendous potential. Judas *was* a disciple, and *could have been an apostle*, just like the others, cf. Acts 1:21-22. But his end was very different, Acts 1:16-20.

However, there are some significant lessons that come from his story *generally*, and the death of Jesus *specifically*:

1) There is a perhaps small but significant difference between *remorse/regret* (translated from *metamellomai*, which literally means “to care afterwards,” v.3 in the NASV) and *repentance* (*metanoia*, which includes the concepts of *reversal* and *reformation* in its definition, 3:2; 2Cor.7:10). *Remorse/regret* can be motivated by any number of factors, but may not actually change anything beyond our *feelings*. But *repentance*, on the other hand, necessarily implies a future *change of conduct/course* as a result of true *sorrow for sin*, Acts 2:36-38; 3:19.

2) We can't, or don't, always see the ultimate outcome of our actions- especially those we take *emotionally in anger or through spite*. I have no doubt that Judas truly *regretted* having betrayed Jesus when he realized that it would result in His death. But that consequence, I am just as sure, though perhaps not intended and surely regretted, was unforeseen when Judas made the deal and did the deed, cf. Matt.26:6-13,14-16. So, before we act, we need to stop, calm down, and think through the matter at hand!

3) Some actions, no matter how much we may later regret them, cannot be “undone,” cf. Matt.27:3-3-4; cp. Heb.12:15-17. but must be “overcome” by repentance and renewed commitment. Judas surely made several mistakes along the way by being untrustworthy and becoming a thief, and he surely made a *huge* mistake in betraying innocent blood, cf. Matt.26:24, but he, like Peter and the others who fled and denied the Christ, could have *repented* and *returned* as they did, cp. Matt.26:56,69-75 → Acts 1:15ff; 2:14ff!

4) Suicide is no substitute for repentance. Judas and Peter were both *unfaithful* at the very least to Jesus (and the rest of the disciples *fled* and abandoned Him for that matter, cf. 26:56). Both were also *sorrowful* for their previous actions. But, Peter's *godly sorrow* led him to *repentance* and greatness in the kingdom; while Judas' *sorrow of the world* led him only to death, 2Cor.7:10. Only God truly knows the capabilities and limitations- and therefore the accountability, of the human mind. We cannot sit in judgment of one who takes their own life when their cognitive abilities or capabilities for rational thought are diminished. However, in other cases where mental disease and disorder **are not at play**, please understand this: Suicide is neither noble nor brave. It shouldn't be glorified or excused. And as an “escape” from the remorse and regret of sin, it is cowardly, selfish, and grossly unsatisfactory, Acts 1:20.