

Who Killed Jesus? Suspect #2 (Judas)

1. Warm-up Question: Life is full of disappointments, some that are huge, others quite small. What's a small, maybe even silly, disappointment you've experienced lately?
2. If we were to ask Judas, "Why did you betray Jesus?" He'd probably say, "I didn't betray Jesus; *he* betrayed me!" To understand Judas' perspective, we have to piece together the evidence. For starters, Judas' surname, Iscariot, is derived from a term that meant "dagger men." In first century Jewish culture, there was a movement known as the Zealots. The Zealots advocated violent expulsion of the Romans from Jewish territory. The Dagger Men were a subgroup of ultra-Zealots who carried a knife with them at all times so they could assassinate Romans or Jewish collaborators when the opportunity presented itself. Judas, it seems, was a Dagger Man.
 - a. Knowing that Judas was a Dagger Man helps fill out his portrait. What does his membership in the Dagger Men tell us about his personality – both good and bad?
 - b. The Zealots believed that if Israel got its act together and rebelled against Rome, God would raise up a Messiah to lead them to victory and usher in a golden age of prosperity. Why do you think Jesus wanted Judas, a Zealot, to be one of his twelve core disciples? What might Jesus have seen in Judas?
 - c. What did Judas see in Jesus? What may have motivated him to accept Jesus' call to become a disciple?
 - d. As the month's passed, Judas' enthusiasm for Jesus seemed to fade. When Jesus said, "Love your enemies," and "If anyone (i.e., a Roman soldier) forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile" (Matthew 5:38-43), what do you think was going on in the heart and mind of Judas?
 - e. When Jesus "began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem . . . and be killed" (Matthew 16:21), what do you think was going on in the heart and mind of Judas?
3. The final straw for Judas was when Jesus allowed Mary to anoint his feet with an expensive alabaster box of perfume with a value of \$30,000 in today's currency. Mark 14:10 tells us, "Then Judas Iscariot . . . went to the chief priests in order to betray Jesus to them. When they heard it, they were greatly pleased and promised to give him money." John's Gospel gives us the most detail account of what happened. Read John 12:1-8, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. Judas said that the perfume should have been sold, so they could give money to the poor. How might that perspective have fit with Judas' Zealot passions?
 - b. John suggests that Judas' real motive was to siphon off the money, perhaps so he could afford to leave Jesus and go back to being a Dagger Man and supporting their cause. Jeff suggested that Judas might have also thought that, getting Jesus

arrested, might cause Jesus' many followers to rise up in violent rebellion against Rome. Do you think there's any merit to that theory? Why or why not?

4. Whatever the specifics of Judas' complex motivations, the bottom line is that he became deeply disillusioned and lost his faith when Jesus failed to act in the ways Judas thought he should. Judas isn't the only one who's ever experienced that. It's quite common for people to lose their faith when God fails to act in ways they think God should.
 - a. When have you experienced a disappointment so bitter, you were tempted to give up on God? What happened? Did you give up on God? Why or why not?
 - b. Jeff told a story about a law school friend named Mark who lost his faith when his father died of a brain aneurism at age 50. Jeff asked Mark, "When you became a Christian did you really think that meant God was going to exempt you from anything bad ever happening in your life?" How would you answer that question? Can people of faith expect to experience less suffering than others?
 - c. Isaiah 43:1 says, "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, and you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you. When you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you, for I am the Lord your God . . . , your Savior." What does this passage promise us? What does it not promise? When someone dies, or experiences great suffering, is that a breach of the promise made in this passage? Why or why not?

5. In Sunday's sermon, Jeff said, "Life is complicated and well beyond our ability to figure out. Yes, it's good to make plans. Go ahead and make plans for your life. But hold those plans loosely. God is infinite and we're not. If there is a cosmic plan crafted by an infinite God for the infinite reality in which we find ourselves, it only makes sense that, as finite creatures, there will be lots of times when what's happening around us (or to us) is beyond our capacity to understand. In those moments, our faith is tested. Don't make Judas' mistake. When life (or God) disappoint you, that's precisely when you need your faith more than ever to get through the fire. Instead of rebelling, accept what is, find the sweetness in what is, and trust that God has a plan."
 - a. What thought or phrase in the foregoing quote speaks to you or troubles you?
 - b. Have you ever known someone who, like Judas, resented and rejected their lot in life and pushed God away? How did that affect them? Did it serve them well?
 - c. Have you ever known someone who embraced hardship in their life and sought to make the best of it, working in partnership with God? How did that affect them? Did it serve them well?
 - d. What's something in your life right now that you need to embrace and make the best of?

John 12:1-8

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ²There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him.

³Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

⁴But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, ⁵'Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?' ⁶(He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.)

⁷Jesus said, 'Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. ⁸You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.'