

## LEARNING FROM A WICKED TEACHER

"Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? seest thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself" (Matthew 27:3-5).

If I were to ask you to name a representative of all that is best, the most spotless purity, the greatest mercy, the most constant love, the deepest tenderness and the most enduring patience, instinctively you would mention the name of Jesus Christ. By way of contrast, if I were to ask you to name a representative of the worst, immediately you would mention the name of Judas Iscariot. Judas is esteemed the worst because of his relationship to, attitude toward, and response to Christ.

People have various titles to fame. Some are remembered with pride by their fellow countrymen for valor in the battlefield. Others are famous because of the influence they wielded, the genius they displayed, or the self-sacrifice and the beautiful spirit which characterized their lives. There are still others who have a reputation for their evil deeds. The most infamous of men, who betrayed the best in order that his sinful desires might be satisfied, is Judas Iscariot. What privileges were his! Yet, in spite of what he might have been, he fell so low that his name has become the synonym for basest treachery and blackest guilt.

Judas has always been a character of intense interest to people everywhere. Their interest in him has been due to the fact that people are fascinated with wrongdoing. Crime and evil occupy a large percentage of space in newspapers, magazines, books, movies and television programs. People avidly read the details of murders, thefts, divorces, and other scandalous conduct. The more wicked a person, the more certain that the masses will be interested in his actions. This characteristic of people is indicated by the fact that people would rather hear a message about Judas Iscariot, or some other great sinner, than they would about Christ, or one of His devoted followers.

No man is ever so bad but what others may learn some important and valuable lessons from him. In fact, some of the greatest lessons of life are those we have seen enacted in tragic experiences, as men have thrown themselves away, and have run the gauntlet of sin and shame. No name in history has gathered about it such odium and contempt as that of Judas.

Esau sold his birthright and by such childish conduct made himself the joke of the centuries, but Judas sold more than a birthright. Judas sold his name, his honor, and his soul for less than a mess of pottage. Achan stole the forbidden wealth of Jericho and his deed made him a stench in the nostrils of the Israelites, but Judas betrayed and sold the Lord of heaven for less than the price of a common slave at public auction. Can any good lessons be learned from one who was so vile and unprincipled?

The fall of any man is measured by the distance he has to go. The immoral man cannot fall very far, the man of little honor, or of little influence, or of little opportunity, cannot fall very far, because he is not high enough; the fall of such is inconsequential in comparison to the fall of one higher up, one of wide influence or of pretentious position. Judas was honored as very few men of the earth have been

honored. For three years he walked the roads of Palestine with Jesus Christ, and then he sold Him to His enemies to be put to death, thereby winning for himself a place in the rogues gallery. All the base sins of the world seemed to have converged into his deed, which was the climax of all the wicked designs of the devil.

Let us sit at the feet of this wicked teacher, Judas Iscariot, and learn from him some of the lessons that all of us should know, and never forget.

I. Judas was shocked at the outcome of his sin.

This is made clear by the statement, "When he saw that he was condemned." This means that when Judas saw that Christ was condemned he began to realize what he had done. No doubt Judas thought that Christ would escape out of the hands of His foes as He had done on other occasions, and that he would be the richer by the transaction and Christ would be none the worse for it. Judas thought he would be able to buy something with the thirty pieces of silver, and that his bargain would be a pretty good one. He also thought that the Lord Jesus would assert Himself and never go to the cross. He reasoned, "He will never let His enemies put Him to death." He merely supposed that the transaction would turn out to his own profit.

The result of the sin of Judas was a surprise and a shock to him. And that is the lesson of first importance here. The results of the sins of men are always worse than they expect, or than they can imagine. Sin is so subtle, so deceptive, and so prolific that no man can compute the full consequences of it.

History is full of the surprises of sin. Adam did not have any thought of the far-reaching results of his disobedience to God in the Garden of Eden. The world is still reaping the harvest of that sin. King Saul disobeyed the command of God and thought it a light matter, but he lost his kingdom because of it, and the honor and reputation of his name and the name of his family perished because sin produced a greater harvest than he expected. The same was true with Moses when he smote the rock in the wilderness; true, it was not just the thing he had been commanded to do, but it seemed just as good, and he thought such a small infraction surely would not have such bad results, but the outcome surprised him greatly.

It is a part of military warfare to ensnare the enemy into defeat by a slim hope of victory. Armies have fled to get the enemy to follow, and thus have been led into a snare and have found themselves surrounded by unexpected foes. On one occasion some leaders were seeking a leader, when the name of a prospect was suggested. One man in the group had been in college with the man whose name was mentioned, and he was asked for any information that would throw any light on his character and ability. He related a story of his college days and the men replied, "He is not the man for us, he may be brilliant but he cannot be trusted." Little did this school boy think that his unprincipled deed would be bearing fruit long years afterward, or that the longforgotten incident was still alive and bearing fruit, and when least expected it bore a harvest of shame. It is the surprise element in sin that is so often overlooked, and it is this element that men need to be most concerned about. All need to give earnest heed to this lesson from the deed of Judas.

II. Judas thought that he could escape the consequences of his sin.

This is the vain hope of every criminal. Who would rob a bank if he knew he was soon to be caught, convicted and punished for his crime? Who would give way to the evil impulses of his wicked nature if he thought he would have to pay the penalty in physical suffering? Few, if any at all. But men commit their crimes in the hope, and with the confident belief, that they will escape punishment. They hope in spite of the fact that seldom do such criminals escape for long, but they have the notion that their cases will be the exceptions, that others may get caught, but that they will escape. When Cain slew his brother in the field, he surely thought that would be the last of it. When David had Uriah killed in battle to get rid of him, in order that he might have Uriah's wife, he, no doubt, thought that would be the end of the affair, that since he, the king, was having it done, nobody would dare to raise a question about it. When Judas betrayed Christ, he was so well shielded by the hatred of the Jews, by the authority of the Roman powers, and by the public sentiment against Christ, he felt perfectly safe in his crime. Who cared for the downfall of Christ? Who would accuse Judas of having a part in it? Because of prevailing conditions—political, social and religious—Judas felt perfectly secure in his crime. In fact, there was no accuser, neither was there any law to bring him to justice, but out of the silent night there was an accusing finger leveled in his face, and from which there was no escape.

One night a thief stole the Sunday's collections out of a church. As he was leaving he heard the footsteps of somebody in the dark. Hastening to escape, he found himself locked in, and in the darkness he struck a rope hanging from the loft above. He undertook to climb this rope in order to elude the pursuer, but when he threw his weight upon that rope the bell above began to ring, and he was soon caught. Then he turned and addressed the bell in the words: "If it had not been for your long tongue, I would have escaped." But the long tongue of one's crime will always cry out against him. A man cannot escape his sin until he escapes his conscience and God.

III. Judas thought he could conceal his sin.

Judas followed Christ into the Garden of Gethsemane and kissed Him, trying to hide his crime under the cloak of friendship, but the eye of the Lord could look through that thin veil.

Joseph's brethren sold him and carried home to their father the sad tale of his having been killed by wild beasts, and the old father never would have known the truth had it not been for the fact that by strange providences the unexpected happened. Jacob deceived his old father who was blind, but his sin could not be concealed always. He ran from his sin for twenty years, but finally had to meet his brother face to face and acknowledge his wrong. A boy was planting cotton on a farm, and one day, when he was almost finished, the man for whom he was working told him that he could quit when he planted the sack of seed. When he was at the far end of the field, he dug a hole and covered a lot of those remaining seed, and soon got through with the planting. All went well for a few days, but he was not able to forget those seed down at the far end. One day after a rain had fallen, the man suggested to him that they walk out over the

field to see how the cotton was coming up. It seemed to the boy that he went straight to the place where he had covered that seed, and to his shame there seemed to be a multitude of plants. When he caught him looking in another direction, he tried to destroy all of them by raking his foot over them, but those seeds came up repeatedly all summer. The Bible says, "He that covereth his sin shall not prosper." Judas found that out, and many others have done likewise, after it was too late. Judas forgot that he was dealing with One Who did not look upon the surface, but Who knew the secrets of the hearts of men. His kiss did not hide the treachery of his heart, nor did the claim to friendship conceal the hidden conspiracy.

#### IV. Judas tried to undo his sin.

Judas brought the money he had received from the priests and wanted to cancel the trade, but they laughed in his face. After pleading with them, he threw the money down on the floor and left it there. When he was contemplating the sale of Jesus Christ, the thought of getting the money was most pleasant to him. After the sale was completed, his conscience began to function, and he realized that he had committed a terrible sin in betraying the Lord Jesus. Even though he committed suicide, he could not undo his sin.

When Jay Gould was a young man in college he wrote an essay and later developed it into a book on the subject of "The Evils of Wealth." Later he became a rich man, and he modified greatly his ideas on that subject, but wherever he went he found someone who had read his little book and he was constantly reminded of his former views, so he decided to buy up every copy of that book he could find and destroy them, but that only made people talk more about it. He tried to undo at the age of fifty what he had done at the age of twenty, but he could not do it.

No sin can be undone. Men may apologize for it, repent of it, and try to make amends for it, and may be forgiven the wrongs done, but the thing itself cannot be undone, whether it be an unkind word spoken, an ugly letter written, or a cruel blow struck. If you would only learn this lesson, and be governed accordingly, both you and others would avoid much suffering. Before you speak, stop and think, for the thing spoken can never be unspoken. Learn from Judas that one cannot undo sin.

#### V. Judas condemned himself for his sin.

So far as we know, no one said anything to Judas about his sin. There is not the slightest hint in the Bible that anyone accused him of doing wrong. Then, why was he disturbed? Why did he come seeking to undo it, and why was he in such distress of mind? He was smitten by his own conscience. He had within him a merciless witness against himself. He could not cover his sin with false pretenses, nor could he successfully offer an alibi, nor could he claim ignorance. None of these things can be used successfully with one's own conscience. His conscience and the court of God were so merciless that Judas took his life hoping to escape them.

VI. Judas exonerated Christ against Whom he had sinned.

To hear this man who betrayed Christ come back and defend Him with his last breath means far more than the defense of a loyal friend. Judas condemned himself, but he exonerated Christ. He said: "I have sinned in that I have betrayed innocent blood." He did not say, "I was led into this by others." Neither did he say, "Others are as much to blame for this as I am." He said, "I have sinned." He was filled with remorse.

Judas did not have to betray Christ. Nobody compelled him to do it. He did it of his own volition. If he had only seen the truth that no man can give up Jesus Christ to the cross without going to the gallows himself, Judas would not have entered that trade with the enemies of the Saviour. Sin is the most deceptive thing in the world, and many are persuaded that it is profitable. Sin always reacts upon the transgressor, and leads him to ruin. The guilt of Judas was his own. That is ever the case when anybody makes a wrong choice.

Unsaved friend, won't you here and now receive Christ as your personal Saviour, acknowledge Him as such, enthrone Him as the Lord of your life, and crown Him Lord of all?