

I. Intro

A. Transition 1:

1. Who do you think of when you hear the word, “traitor”? Brutus or Cassius? Americans generally say, “Benedict Arnold.” The Brits point to “Guy Fawkes.” At our Thursday night service someone yelled out, “Bret Favre.” I’m not sure deciding to leave Green Bay and play for the Vikings earns Bret a spot on this list. But there is one name that shows up every time, Judas Iscariot. Today, we are going to think about Judas. What can we learn from him – about life, or about ourselves, about God?

B. Luke 22:47-53. (There are pictures behind this).

1. While he was still speaking, a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him, but Jesus asked him, “Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?”

2. When Jesus’ followers saw what was going to happen, they said, “Lord, should we strike with our swords?”⁵⁰ And one of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear.

3. But Jesus answered, “No more of this!” And he touched the man’s ear and healed him.

4. Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, and the elders, who had come for him, “Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and clubs?⁵³ Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour—when darkness reigns.”

II. Announcement / Generosity Moment / Prayer

III. Transition video - Baptism

IV. If you missed the service last Sunday night, I’m sorry. It was wonderful. Eleven hundred people were there. Seventy-three people were baptized from six different churches.

A. I got flooded with emails about how wonderful the service was. Most of them claiming that it was the best thing to ever happen in this building.

B. I’m not sure if that’s true – but we know that we certainly want to do it again. We’re not sure when or if we’ll do it here. I think once word gets out there will not be near enough seating. We will keep you posted.

V. OK, moving from the sublime to the tragic. Today we turn our attention to Judas.

A. We are in the last week of Christ’s life. It’s early Friday morning. Jesus has about twelve hours to live.

B. The previous Sunday he paraded into Jerusalem. That Monday and Tuesday he taught in the Temple courtyard.

C. On Wednesday, Judas cut a deal with the authorities to turn Jesus in. They paid him 30 pieces of silver- which is exactly the amount Zechariah 11:13 predicted 700 years earlier.¹ (This is just one of a few hundred ways Jesus perfectly fulfilled the prophecies about the Messiah – almost all of which, like this, he didn’t control.

1. A few years ago, I did the math on this myself. I calculated the odds that anyone could fulfill eight of the several hundred prophecies to be 1×10 to the 17^{th} . Which is my Uncle's number for the grains of sand on the planet. And when I took my calculations to a U of Chicago professor of Stats and asked her to check my math, she said the math and reasoning are sound, but she would not allow me to say the odds are 1 in 1×10 to the 17^{th} . She said, "that is certitude." It's fact. There are no odds.

2. History does not lend itself to the kind of proof scientists demand. You cannot rerun events controlling different variables to test your hypothesis. It takes faith. But it's not faith in the absence of evidence. There are so many ways that Jesus jumps off the pages of history.

D. On Thursday night: 1) the disciples gathered for the Passover Meal in an Upper Room. During the dinner, Jesus claimed he was the ultimate Passover Lamb; 2) He said the service was all about Him. And then, as the meal ended, he also announced that someone in the room would betray him, and Judas slipped away to do just that; 3) after the meal, Jesus told his disciples that things were going to be tough, and then; 4) they all walked to the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus prayed – and suffered – while they slept.

E. We now arrive at our text. Luke 22:36ff

VI. While he was still speaking

A. While Jesus was still talking to his disciples – letting them know that it would have been nice of them to stay awake and pray for him like he had asked.

VII. While he was still speaking, a crowd came up,

A. The crowd included Roman guards and significant Jewish and Roman leaders. Arresting Jesus was not an assignment pawned off to some flunkies. There was senior brass there, which suggests how unnerved Jesus had made them.

VIII. While he was still speaking, a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him, but Jesus asked him, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?"

A. Jesus refers to himself as, "The Son of Man." This is a big, bold claim from Daniel 7 that sounds humble but is not. Most people did not understand it's meaning. The religious leaders who did would always go crazy every time he used it. It's was a clear claim to be God.²

B. The fact that Judas identified Jesus with a kiss – which was a form of greeting among close friends at that time – has been a topic of speculation. Was he indicating that he really did care for him, even as he was betraying him? Was he turning the knife? Jesus seems a bit frustrated that that is the way Judas would betray him. "Really? You're going to pretend to be my loyal friend even as you set me up to be killed? There is low and there is really, really low." We don't know which it is.

IX. V49: When Jesus' followers saw what was going to happen,

A. What they realized was, Jesus is going to be arrested and killed. Roman guards didn't read you your Miranda rights and issue warnings. This was the first century, the Romans ruled the world and the Jews, while not slaves, was a nation they had conquered.

X. V49: When Jesus' followers saw what was going to happen, they said, "Lord, should we strike with our swords?" And one of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear. But Jesus answered, "No more of this!" And he touched the man's ear and healed him. Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, and the elders, who had come for him, "Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and clubs? Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me.

A. Jesus said, "I haven't been hiding. Why are you doing this in the dark of night?" The answer is clear:

1. They are moving in secret because they want to arrest Jesus away from any crowds that might riot.
2. But also, the deeper suggestion is, they are people of the dark. Their actions are evil. Which is captured by the last line in this section.

XI. But this is your hour – when darkness reigns."

XII. At this point, four things will happen:

A. The disciples will scatter. Peter (and John) will follow at a distance, with Peter showing up at the fire outside the place where Jesus is being held. That is where he famously denies him three times. But at least he showed up. The other disciples are nowhere to be found.

B. Secondly, the Romans will violate their own laws in prosecuting and condemning Jesus. He'll be hurriedly paraded before various groups: Jewish leaders, Pilate, Herod and then back to Pilate, who does his best not to have to make a decision – washing his hands of the whole affair – before ordering Jesus beaten and crucified.

C. Third, Jesus will be crucified – which fulfills more prophecies – and which also accomplishes God's plan. God the Son dies a sacrificial death which atones for our sins.

D. Judas will suffer remorse. In fact, he'll try to return the money and then will later end his own life.³

XIII. A few other things will happen over time.

A. Such as, the name Judas becomes pretty undesirable.⁴ Parents stop naming their little boys, Judas. I doubt you've met a Judas. There are a whole host of biblical names that continue on today – e.g., Peter, James, John, Matthew, Ben, Michael, Mary, Hannah - but Judas? Not so much.

B. And then, later – recently – a movement sprouts up to restore Judas's reputation. We get a bit of that in *The DaVinci Code* with Dan Brown. He argues that Judas was one of the sane ones. And then a few years back, a few people made a big splash over the supposed discovery of *The Gospel of Judas*, where it is claimed that Judas was a good guy, who turned Jesus in as part of Jesus's own plan. These are the kind of things that light up the press, but most sane people and scholars look at this and yawn.

XIV. All of that to say, Judas remains a well-known – but generally despised – name. The question now is, what can we learn from Judas? What are the appropriate take-a-ways from this passage? Sermons on Judas usually go in one of a few directions:

- A. Some use Judas as a chance to debate whether a Christ-follower can lose their salvation. Was Judas in and then out? Or was he never in?
- B. Some dive into a discussion about divine sovereignty and human free will, wrestling with whether, if Judas was part of God’s plan, he should be held responsible for what he did.
- C. I’ve read articles that use Judas to discuss group dynamics, arguing that Judas got sideways with Jesus because he never really fit in. All of the other disciples were from Galilee but he wasn’t. Or pointing out that as the treasurer of the group he thought differently than the others, about Jesus needed to do a better job holding the group together.⁵ And his name comes up in many articles about hiring, where it is pointed out that if Jesus can make a bad hire, anyone can.
- D. I think these are exercises in missing the point. One of the advantages of making a slow trek through a book – like we have done with Luke – is that you see things you might not otherwise see. One thing jumps off the page.

XV. Two people betray Jesus in Luke 22: Peter and Judas. One repents and goes on, the other does not and crashes. Two people throw Jesus under the bus. Two men deny Christ. Peter recovers and goes on to be a founding pillar in the church. Judas ends his live and becomes a pariah. What’s the difference?⁶ Simple. They both felt bad – the both felt remorse, but only one repented.

- A. Repentance is a big deal in the Bible.
 - 1. The Gospels open with John the Baptist calling people to repent.
 - 2. In Mark, Jesus’ first word is “repent.”
 - 3. And it comes up a lot after that.
- B. So let me ask, “are you quick to repent and be reconciled with God?”
- C. Let me back up a half step, because this is something you need to understand for repentance to make sense. There are a few ways we are like Judas.
 - 1. Like Judas, we want a savior who will bless our plans. That’s what Judas wanted. He was with Jesus when it looked like Jesus was going to acquire a lot of power. Sunday’s parade into Jerusalem was a very promising moment for him. It looked like Jesus was going to bring about the kind of political empire Judas wanted to be a part of. But after Jesus spent the next few days moving in a very different direction, Judas decided it was time to bail. He wanted a Messiah who would bless his plans. So do I. So do you. Peter differs on this point. When Jesus points out how hard it will be to follow him, Peter says, “Where else can we go? You alone have the words of eternal life.”
 - 2. Secondly, we all end up denying Christ. I’m not guilty of any high profile, egregious denials of Christ. No one has placed a gun to my head and said, “Deny Christ or die.” Only to have me say, “OK, I’ll deny him” I suspect that in that situation I’d be OK. It’s not the direct attacks I fear. It’s the subtle ones. It’s not the big, clear, are you in or out, moments that I fear. It’s the quiet ones and the thousands of small decisions. Today we are most likely to deny Christ by what we

leave unsaid. And not because we fear death, but because we don't want people to think less of us.

3. Thirdly, like Judas, we are guilty. When we hear about Judas we should not think, "I'm so glad I'm not like him!" Our response should be, "Wow, I'm pretty much just like him. It's the grace of God that keeps me out of the kind of trouble he fell into."

a) In order for this to make sense, we need to realize that we are sinners. I've said this before but I am pretty sure many of you don't get it. The Good News is, God forgives sinners. For the record, there is no promise that he forgives mistakers or victims.

(1) Mistakers do not say, "I sinned. I am guilty." They say, "tragically, mistakes were made."

(2) Victims – and yes, there are real victims, but we are still responsible for our actions. Victims say, "It's not my fault, my parents... or the school... or this person," etc.

b) In order to repent we have to start from the premise that we are guilty, that we have a serious heart problem. It's not a minor deal. We are sinners. And... the wages of sin is death.

D. Two weeks ago, Lent started with the Ash Wed. service. I find it quite an amazing service. It's not long.

1. We have a few people read various Old and New Testament passages about sin. I explain Lent, noting that it's a time when we try to make things personal. It's when we don't rush to get to the Good News. We pause to note that we are sinful and that our sin required a payment. I explain that ashes are a symbol of death and humility. And then I invite people who want to receive ashes to step forward, explaining that, when they do I will say,

a) "Remember, you are dust and to dust you will return." In other words, though everyone else tells you that you are wonderful and special and precious – which is true – I am going to share the other side of the story: you are guilty and you will die.

b) And I coach them to respond, "When I put ashes on your forehead and tell you that you are dust, the right response is, 'Amen.'" Yes. I know. I agree.

2. It's very moving to say to young people – 15 years old and full of life – "you are guilty and you will die." But that is the frame of reference we need in order to repent.

E. That frame of reference should be increasingly obvious to us over time. Let me share a diagram with you. I've used this before. But it helps here. CHART

1. The cross represents the spot where you come to faith. At that point, our view of God is small and our view of ourselves is usually not that bad. We get that there is a gap and we need help.

2. As you walk with Christ, two things should happen:

a) Your view of God grows – and you realize that he is a lot bigger and better than you thought.

b) And your view of yourself changes. And you realize that you are worse. I'm not saying that you act worse – our behavior should improve. But we realize how broken we are.

F. Men and women, here's the deal. Peter got this and Judas didn't. Both felt bad – but there is a difference between remorse and repentance.

1. Tears often accompany both. And both likely lead to a pledge that things will be different. But remorse falls short of repentance.
2. Remorse feels bad about the failure – about the fall out of the sin. But doesn't truly own the sin. And it doesn't include a request for forgiveness. Repentance accepts guilt and asks for forgiveness.
3. Repentance feels bad about grieving God. And it does include repentance.

XVI. We are going to end the sermon a bit differently today.

A. Stephen Adly Guirgis is a Pulitzer prize winning playwright who, along with Jim Martin, a pastor, wrote a play in 2005 called *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot*. The play explores the role Judas played in the death of Jesus, and the blame he's gotten historically. It ends with a monologue from another character, Butch Honeywell. In the monologue, Butch is in the afterlife talking to Judas, who is catatonic and isn't responding. But Butch keeps talking anyway, and he talks about his own life, and how he was also guilty of betrayal.

B. We're going to hear that monologue right now from Syler Thomas, who is a pastor here, and who performed in this play downtown years ago. I hope it helps you see ways in which we are all more like Judas than we might want to admit.

XVII. Syler

A. . . . So ... I think I'm dead, Mister Iscariot, and, I'm a little concerned about that 'cuz I don't think my soul's ready for judgment, but nobody else has so far corroborated that I'm dead so, I just don't bring it up, but, the fact is that if this is a dream, it's the longest damn dream I've ever endured—and really, I just ... I really miss my wife, Mister Iscariot. Is it okay if I tell you that?

B. I remember, I was with these two girls that night, when I first seent my wife, Mister Iscariot. It was a party at Jimmy Rayburn's house 'cuz Jimmy's momma worked till midnight so he had the house to himself, and, you know, me and these two girls— Suzie Heller and Della Mae Robbins—we were just talkin', smokin' cigarettes, out on Mrs. Rayburn's deck away from the party. I was depressed over sumpthin' or other— proolly 'cuz school was ending—plus I had just been in the school play—I had played Tom in *The Glass Menagerie*—it was the first time I had ever acted, and everyone said I was real good. But now, the play was over, and school was almost over, and, for the part in the play, they had given me this real short haircut—like 1940s style—and my ears, Mister Iscariot, I don't know if you can notice, but, they stick out a little bit, so, with the short haircut and all, I was feeling a little self-conscious and dumb, and, anyway, just not too cheery ... So anyways, I'm out there on the deck talkin' to Suzie and Della—and all a the sudden I see this girl inside at the party. She had, I guess, just arrived, and she had on a red jacket. It was a cheerleading jacket from the high school just across the state line in Virginia—*The Red Raiders*—and I remember, all I saw was blonde hair, and a red jacket,

and this smile that was—even from a distance—just kinda electrifying to the heart, ya know? ‘Bout a minute later, the sliding door to the deck opens, and this girl, she comes out by herself, and she’s heading towards us—turns out she’s friends with Della from back in the day, from, I don’t know, Girl Scouts, Brownies, sumptin’ like that. Anyways, she walks over—and she was so beautiful, that I remember thinkin’ to myself—and this is exactly word for word what I thought—“I ain’t even gonna bother talkin’ to this girl.” So she comes over, says hello, and I just excuse myself right off the deck and head back inside, fixin’ ta say my “good-byes” and skedaddle ...

C. And anyways, I try to leave, but then, Jimmy handed me a beer, and someone else started passin’ a bottle of Rebel Yell, and before you know it, I’m sittin’ on the couch when this girl—my future wife—she just comes up to me by herself and she says: “I saw you in that play the other night. You made me cry” ... Two days later, we went out on a date ... On the way back, I was driving her home, and we passed by this house where my friend Dave Hoghe used to live who had died ... I hadn’t been by his house since he passed. The family didn’t live there no more. But when I saw the house, I got struck with this feeling, and I asked her if she wouldn’t mind if we just pulled up in front of that house and just sat for a moment. She said: “Sure.” So I parked, and we just sat in the car for a while. Quiet. Not sayin’ nothin’.

D. And before I knew it, Mister Iscariot, I was tearing up—’cuz this kid, he had been a real good friend of mine, ya know—and then, I just started crying, Mister Iscariot. I couldn’t help myself and I couldn’t shut it off. And I was real embarrassed, and she just, she just held me while tears and snot and whatnot just poured outta me and onto her little white sweater ... And she didn’t mind about that ... She didn’t mind at all ... At some point, I drove her home, and we got to her door, and we started to kiss, and, well, God, it was like, I’ll tell ya—it was like peaches and dynamite ... And before I left, I apologized to her about the crying and all, and she said: “Don’t be a fool[jackass], Butch Honeywell,” and I smiled, but then I went on to explain my meaning, which was—you know—if you want a girl to think you’re sensitive or something, then maybe taking her to the house of your dead friend and crying all over her pretty white sweater might be a good way to pull it off, and, you know what she said, Mister Iscariot? ... She looked at me for a good long while with them all the way dazzling eyes of hers and then she just said: “Well, if it was a trick ... then I’m tricked”

E. Three years into our marriage, I took a job teaching at the State College—I was popular with the students ’cuz I found a way to make ‘em wanna learn. One night, at the end of the semester, they took me out for beers. I ended up havin’ an assignation with one of the coeds—young lady named Lucy. And I went home that night, got into bed next to my wife drunk as a skunk and I remember, before I passed out, I was lookin’ at her. I always liked to look at her when she was sleeping ’cuz she always looked so good. I had a little nickname for her, I useta call her “my little baby dinosaur,” ’cuz that’s how she looked like when she slept—like one of those cute cartoon little baby dinosaurs—like a little brontosaurus, but cute ... Anyways, when I woke up the next mornin’, she was still sleepin’, and what I had done the night before came back to me, and I looked at my wife, and, boy, she looked exactly the same as always, but, somehow, she just wasn’t my little baby dinosaur no more, ya know? And she woke up, and she didn’t know nuthin’ ’bout nuthin’, everything was exactly the same as if the night before had never happened, except, it wasn’t the same, and I knew it. And I had no idea why I had done what I done.

But I had done it. And it couldn't be changed. My girl, she got up and fixed blueberry French toast with maple walnut pecans. I didn't eat it. No way I coulda eaten it. Nuthin' was ever the same after that morning, Mister Iscariot, ya know? I tried a lot of things to make it better, the only thing that did was more beer and women ...

F. Do you know who W. H. Auden was, Mister Iscariot? W. H. Auden was a poet who once said: "God may reduce you on Judgment Day to tears of shame, reciting by heart the poems you would have written, had your life been good" ... She was my poem, Mister Iscariot. Her and the kids. But mostly ... her ... You cashed in Silver, Mister Iscariot, but me? Me, I threw away Gold ... That's a fact. That's a natural fact.

XVIII. I said that the big difference between Peter and Judas was that Peter owned his sin and Judas did not. I think they also had a different view of God.

A. The Good News we celebrate is not: I'm good. I'm better than Judas. It's, wow, I'm a lot like Judas, but God is loving and good. His love and grace are greater than my sin. We rejoice today not that we are not like Judas, but that, even though we are a lot like him, when we repent, God forgives and restores us.

XIX. Final Song

XX. Wrap Up / Announcements

A. We opened with a list of betrayers: Benedict Arnold, Brutus and Cassius, Guy Fawkes, with Judas first on the list. The hope is that as we leave you realize, your own name has a place on that list.

B. If you come away thinking, "Judas was a bad guy, but I'm a good guy," you did not listen. You have missed the point entirely.

C. But God knows that and His love is so great, it eclipses our worst sin.

¹ See also Psalm 41:9 and John 13:18.

² See Daniel 7:13

³ In Matthew we are told that Judas hung himself. In Acts 1 we see that he bought a field and fell from a high place (There is a rather grizzly description of what happens). Some see this as a discrepancy – a contradiction – in the Bible. But the two passages can be easily reconciled. Judas hung himself and died and then later the rope broke and his body fell onto the rocks. The benefit of the doubt should always go to the text and not to the critic.

⁴ There are eight different people in the Bible named Judas, suggesting that it used to be a pretty common name. It's not today.

⁵ Those in this camp often argue that Judas was mad at Jesus since Jesus allowed the woman caught in sin to anoint him with expensive nard, rather than sell it for a lot of money.

⁶ Here you either read about Judas – who was the treasurer – being greedy, while Peter was just scared. Or you hear that Judas was more culpable because he planned his sin while Peter was more impetuous. I also do not want to miss the earlier verse in Luke 22 where Jesus says, "Peter I prayed for you."