

Series - A Walk with Christ to the Cross
Judas - The Face of a Disillusioned Follower
John 12, 13; Matthew 27

Introduction: One of the saddest words in the English language is *almost*. In Max Lucado's words, . . . it's a word that smacks of missed opportunities, aborted efforts, and fumbled chances. It's honorable mention, right field, on the bench, runner-up, and burnt cookies. . . [It's] the one that got away. The sale that nearly closed. The gamble that almost paid off. **Almost.**

We speak of people who almost finished the marathon, almost made the big leagues, almost passed the test, almost sank the three-pointer. As long as there have been worthy goals in life and people pursuing them, there have been **almonds**. They say that almost only counts in horseshoes and hand grenades. In most everything else, almost might just as well be not-at-all.

Today I'm beginning a sermon series called, **"A Walk with Christ to the Cross."** And what I want to focus on are the faces of failure of the faith that we see in the lives of **Judas**, *the disillusioned follower*, **Peter**, *the devoted disciple*, and **Pilate**, *the pathetic and political decision-maker*.

Let's Pray

One of the most famous almos of the Bible is Judas—a disciple, a follower of Christ, and the betrayer of Christ. Chosen by the Lord as one of the original twelve, he walked the dusty roads with Jesus and the other eleven disciples for three years. He endured hardships, accepted the persecutions, and seemingly embraced the teachings.

Judas was destined to take his place in history as one of the inner circle who helped launch God's movement of redemption for all eternity. But he didn't make it. He was almost home, but he bailed. He was almost a hero, but he betrayed. Almost redeemed, but he rejected.

The worst tragedy I can think of is to run the race of faith only to bomb in the end and miss the joy of the Lord--like Judas. What made a man like Judas who had the incredible opportunity to serve Jesus Christ an also-ran, a loser, a failure, an almost? It was the lies he believed--the same lies that you and I are tempted to believe and that will just as surely make almos of us as well.

Let's find out where Judas went wrong so we can go right!

Who Is Judas?

Judas was **chosen** by Jesus. When Jesus was putting together his inner circle, when he stayed up all night praying, asking the Father who should the twelve be, Judas was amongst those original disciples.

Judas was **trusted** by Jesus. As they traveled around, preaching the good news that the kingdom of heaven has arrived, it was Judas that was elected to be treasurer; he's the one who watched after the money.

Judas was **loved** by Jesus. When Jesus looked at Judas, he saw somebody that he knit together in his mother's womb, somebody that he knew the number of hairs on his head, and he had designs and plans for his life.

Yet, despite all of that, we know that in the end, Judas betrayed Jesus. He could have had one of those names that will go down in history and everybody would think about naming their son after him. Think about the other disciples. We name our sons Matthew, Mark, John, or Andrew.

Judas means? "Praise be to God." But nobody names their child Judas.

Judas was derived from the nation Judah. Iscariot - refers to the region where he grew up - Kerioth-hezron - a town in south Judah. BTW - Judas was the only disciple not from Galilee.

How is that possible? How do you spend three years with Jesus? How do you meet with him face-to-face? How do you hear with your own ears Jesus teach? How do you see and witness the miracles and then after all that turn around and betray Jesus?

Turn with me to John 13. Here we are at the end of Christ's three-year ministry with his twelve intimate disciples, with whom he has developed a deep friendship. He comes to the end of his ministry and decides that he wants to be alone with these twelve. Starting with verse 1, it says...

John 13: 1 It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

2The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. 3Jesus knew that the Father

had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God;

4so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. **5**After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

10Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you."

11For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not everyone was clean.

12When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. **13**"You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. **14**Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. **15**I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. **16**Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.

17Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

18 "I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill this passage of Scripture: 'He who shared my bread has turned against me.'

19 "I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am who I am.

21After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, "Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray me."

22His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant. **23**One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him. **24**Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, "Ask him which one he means."

25Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, "Lord, who is it?"

26Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to

Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. 27As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him.

So, Jesus told him, "What you are about to do, do quickly." 28But no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him. 29Since Judas had charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the festival, or to give something to the poor. 30As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night.

Seated to the right of Jesus Christ was John, the beloved disciple who was leaning back on the bosom of Christ. But interestingly, most scholars think that Judas was the one seated to the left of Christ—which, by the way, was the place of highest honor. I want you to think about that: Christ intentionally invited Judas to sit at the place of highest honor for the evening.

In the first verse of John 13, John makes a marvelous statement. He said, "Before the feast of the Passover, Jesus, knowing that his hour had come that he should depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world." Look at John's impression. He says, "***He loved them to the end.***" I love this about Jesus Christ—John says, through all of his pain, he never stopped loving us. Having made that marvelous statement of the love of Jesus Christ, the text suddenly takes a nasty turn. John intersects and interrupts the flow of that wonderful thought with verse 2, where he says, "***The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus.***"

The gospel of Luke tells us that as they gathered in the upper room, these twelve guys were discussing an important theological issue.

They were sitting around saying, "Which one of us will be the greatest when Christ comes into the kingdom?" Who's going to be the big shot and have the big spots in the kingdom? And so, in John 13, Christ gets up from the table and takes off his robes and washes their feet. God takes the form of a servant.

Then we get to verse 20, and John takes us back to Judas again. Verse 21 says, "***After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, "Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray me."***"

The disciples began looking at one another." Literally the text says, "they began staring at each other." What a shocking statement this is?

Verse 23 says, "One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him. 24 Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, "Ask him which one he means."

We can assume that this is a quiet conversation between John and Christ. One reason the scholars believe Judas is seated immediately to the left of Christ is because that would be the only way Christ could pull off what he does next. He takes this morsel of bread and dips it into the dish, and hands it to Judas.

What you need to know is that, when a host would do this, he was making a statement of honor and love. And so, not only has Christ seated him in the place of honor, but Christ has extended honor to Judas whom He knows will betray him.

And we read, So then when he dipped the morsel, he took and gave it to Judas the son of Simon Iscariot. And after the morsel, Jesus said, "**Therefore, what you do, do quickly.**"

No one reclining at the table knew why he had said this to Judas. For some were supposing that because Judas had the money that Jesus as saying to him "Go out and by the things we have need, for the feast" or else, that he should give something to the poor. And so after receiving the morsel he went out immediately; [And John adds this note] **and it was night.**

Now the writings of the apostle John reveal that he uses the metaphors of light and dark. The light is always about Jesus Christ, who is indeed the Son. The Son is the light of this world. And the kingdom of Satan is, according to John, always in terms of darkness. Judas is heading into spiritual darkness.

We must ask ourselves why. What would ever drive Judas to do this? But before we answer that question, there are some dynamics about betrayals that we need to know.

1. Betrayal is always an inside issue. Judas was the last guy you would have ever expected to betray Christ. Number one, he was the treasurer. He had been trusted with all the funds of the kingdom. So obviously he is a man who is held in high esteem and high trust. Also, the rest of the disciples have such respect for him that, having watched him closely for three years, when Christ handed him the morsel at Passover and he left, none of him said, "It's him, that figures." They were clueless. Judas had so well concealed his plans that the other disciples had no idea of what was about to take place.

2. Betrayal is always done in the face of Christ's love. Think about this. First, Christ has loved Judas for three years. Judas has never been loved like this before. And now Christ intentionally has given him a seat of honor and Christ intentionally, in love, has shared a gift with him, this morsel of honor. How could you betray in the face of such phenomenal love?

You and I need to think about that. He's loved you like no one has ever loved you before or will ever love you since. The nail scars were all for you. When you and I betray Christ, we have to do it in the face of his amazing love for us.

3. Betrayal is supported by a stubborn will. If you read through the Gospels, by the time they get to the upper room Judas has already cut the deal. He's already made up his mind. He's been to the authorities. He's negotiated the price.

Even when Christ predicts his actions, and in essence says Judas, I know what you're going to do, he gets up and he leaves to do the deed.

Some of you are probably thinking, it says in verse 2 that Satan has put this into Judas' heart. And toward the end that Satan has now entered Judas. So, Judas is a victim. He's a pawn in a cosmic sting and got stuck with the evil role.

Lert me just say that Sin and Salvation are matters of choice.

Sin is SEQUENTIAL. It seldom "just happens." Sin does not come out of nowhere.

We see this sequence in the Book of James: ***"Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God.' For God cannot be tempted by evil and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death"*** (James 1:13-15).

Sin is also PROGRESSIVE. No sinful act is just a simple sin. Unless we repent and ask God's forgiveness it becomes a STEPPING STONE that leads us deeper into rebellion against the Lord.

God is very clear about the fact that all our sin is a matter of choice with us.

What has happened with Judas is that he has made choices that had cultivated the ground where Satan could plant the seed and enter his heart and seduce him. He was seduced based on the cultivation of his life by his choices.

Luke 6:16 give us some insight into what I believed happened to Judas. "Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor."

Somewhere he became blind to the changes in his life that were taking him away from Christ, until it was too late.

Just so you know, we have all betrayed Jesus. Judas becomes the example of what we look like apart from faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus came to forgive and cleanse us from our treachery and betrayal. Jesus has become the great sacrifice for our sin and stands ready to forgive us and make us new again.

What were the choices that led Judas to be the sort of person who could betray Christ?

We don't get it in this text, but I'll briefly point to John 12, just one chapter earlier. Judas is in the house of Lazarus. Lazarus has been raised from the dead by Jesus Christ, and Mary, Lazarus's sister, is trying to figure out how to say thank you to Jesus. Words don't work in a situation like the one she's in; they don't express her gratitude for what Christ had done for her brother.

So, she goes into her bedroom and gets what would have been the most prized possession for a woman of that day, a pound of spikenard oil, the perfume of the richest kind. This oil would have been worth one year's wages; and she brings it out and anoints Christ with it. As she is anointing Christ, Judas is standing back with the disciples and saying something like, "We could have taken this and sold it, and given the money to the poor."

Beware when people sound too spiritual. Because then John adds a note to the story. Remember, he wrote this after the fact. He says, that, "***Judas said this not because he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief and held the treasury.***" The literal translation from the Greek meant that Judas stole from the treasury of the disciples on a regular basis.

I don't think that Judas' greatest sin was stealing from the disciples' common purse, or selling Jesus out to the religious leaders, or being a part of the story that led Jesus to the cross. I think Judas' greatest failure wasn't his decision to **betray** Jesus; it was his decision **not to believe** Jesus.

Judas was there when that miserable traitor, Zacchaeus, expressed sorrow over his past and pledged to live differently going forward. "***Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost'***" (Luke

19:9–10). In other words, “Zacchaeus, you abandoned the Jewish family by becoming a Roman collaborator. But I see your sorrow, your readiness to walk a new way. Welcome back to the family. You are forgiven.” I don’t think Judas believed it.

Judas was also there when the crowd dragged the woman caught in adultery right in front of Jesus. Judas knew exactly what the law required: She ought to have the center seat at a rock concert. She ought to be stoned. But Jesus saw her remorse, and said: **“I don’t condemn you, go now and leave your life of sin”** (John 8:11). Forgiveness for her, when she’d been caught in the act? I don’t think Judas believed it.

Judas was there when Jesus told that story about the son who humiliated his father before the whole neighborhood, disrespected him, took his family’s money and lost it all. Judas knew exactly what should happen. Kill the kid! But according to Jesus’ story, when the Father saw the grief of his son over what he’d done, when he saw his willingness to be a slave if that’s what it took to begin again, **“The father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found’”** (Luke 15:22-24). I don’t think Judas believed it.

The key question I suppose is this: Do you believe it? Do you take Jesus at his word? If Jesus was right about how outrageous the grace of God is—as his voluntary death on the cross and his victory over the grave proves—then you and I have something to believe in. We have something to live for.

Why Did Judas Betray Jesus?

1. Well, the obvious answer is Satan. Satan had a role in this. We’re told in John 13 that the devil prompted Judas and also entered Judas.” Satan was at work in the betrayal and crucifixion of Jesus. We must factor that in.

But Satan only has as much power as we give him. Satan preys upon our weaknesses, Satan looks for opportunity and the advantages that we give him. So, while Satan was involved, there must have been something about Judas that opened the door and allowed for him to be susceptible to the enemy.

So, Satan was involved, but what else? Greed.

2. Greed is one of these doorway sins that opens the door for a whole number of things.

Satan was involved, greed was involved. What about disappointment?

3. Disappointment. Ever been disappointed with God? Ever look at your life and think, I've been following all the rules, I've been doing the right things, so how come things aren't working out the way I want them to?

Ever have a moment where you got on your knees, and you prayed? You begged God: Would you just give me this one thing, but then you were met with the silence of heaven. Ever have a moment where you're there at the bedside of a loved one, watching them suffer, and think to yourself, what kind of God allows this? Ever been disappointed with God?

Then maybe you can identify with Judas. Because not only did Jesus choose Judas, Judas chose Jesus. He gave up everything to follow him for three years. Judas probably thought, this is the guy, and if I just give everything to him, he will be the one who will solve all of my problems. He's the Messiah, he'll be the One who will bring victory and conquest.

Yet what does Jesus do? He starts talking about suffering, dying, and sacrifice, and Judas didn't sign up for that. So maybe Judas betrayed Jesus because he felt like Jesus was betraying him.

Whatever the case, what we do know is this. One night Judas walked into a garden. He found Jesus who had just sweat drops of blood. Judas kissed him on the cheek. The signal has been given. The soldiers rush in. They arrest Jesus, they bind him, they take him off, they punch him in his blindfolded face, they flog his back, and he is now guilty as charged.

What was Judas's problem with Jesus? Did he hate Jesus? Did he think Jesus a fool, or a fraud? No, none of those. Here in Matthew 27, we have the end of Judas's story, where he tries to take back what he has done.

Matthew 27:1-4 "Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people made their plans how to have Jesus executed. 2So they bound him, led him away and handed him over to Pilate the governor.

3When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief

priests and the elders. 4 "I have sinned," he said, "for I have betrayed innocent blood."

"What is that to us?" they replied. "That's your responsibility."

5 So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself.

Look at verse 3: *"When he saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse."* It seems he was surprised that Jesus was condemned. What did he think would happen when he betrayed Jesus?

Judas wanted a Messiah who would deliver people from trouble. He wanted Jesus to step into a phone booth, rip open his robe, and come out with a big Superman S on his chest.

Many think that by betraying Jesus into the hands of the authorities, Judas thought he was simply forcing Jesus into His Superman's role. He was trying to get Jesus to be the kind of Messiah he wanted.

I believe that Judas's meltdown moment was back in Matthew 26:6–14 when Mary anointed Jesus.

Look what Jesus said in verse 12: "When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial."

And what's the very next thing that happens in verse 14–15? *"Then one of the Twelve—the one called Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priests 15 and asked, "What are you willing to give me if I deliver him over to you?" So they counted out for him thirty pieces of silver. 16 From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over."*

Judas was simply not interested in a Messiah who would die. He had no place for a Messiah whose main agenda was to save people from sin.

He wanted a Messiah who would defeat enemies, make people rich and healthy, and solve everyone's problems. **Judas represents the failure of the disillusioned follower; he demands of Jesus what Jesus will not do.**

There are lots of people who believe in Jesus just as Judas did. They believe in a Jesus who will fix messes and solve problems for them. And when he doesn't come through, they get angry.

There is a point of no return for disillusioned followers. Back to Matthew 27, we read of Judas' tragic effort to undo what he had done. It isn't hard to see why some people, reading what Judas did, conclude that he repented and eventually was forgiven by God.

In verse 3 it says, "He was seized with remorse." Verse four says he confessed: "I have sinned for I have betrayed innocent blood." Verse 5 says he returned the money. What more could he do?

Judas felt remorse. There was this moment where he saw everything that was happening and what he caused, and something seismic began to shake deep down inside.

But remorse is different than repentance. Repentance is a 180 degree turn and instead of choosing your way you choose God's way. That's repentance.

Judas didn't repent, he just had deep remorse. It's more like a 90-degree turn. He turns this way—"I can't believe it, I regret, maybe I could fix this, maybe I could unravel what I started." He goes and he gets the 30 pieces of silver, takes it back to those that paid him. Here, you take this back, we rip up the contract, everything is going to be alright. They're like, No. They said to him: "This is your responsibility." Feeling the weight of those words, Judas knows that everything happening to Jesus right now, is on him.. You did this. And so he's like, I'll pay the price. So Judas goes out and he finds a tree, and verse 5 says, "He hung himself."

Judas got it **half** right—he saw and confessed his sin sincerely, but he found no forgiveness or peace, as evidenced by the fact that "he went away and hanged himself" (v. 5). You see, he needed Jesus to do for him what he had never wanted Jesus to do before—forgive sin.

Judas, by his doubt and anger and sin, had seared his own heart so that there was no capacity for faith in Christ left. Having never believed in Jesus as a Savior for sinners, Judas was left with nowhere to turn when he needed a Savior.

Jesus came into this world to save sinners and to reconcile rebellious people to the God who loves them. That is why you and I so desperately need him. Before it is too late, before you pass the point of no return like Judas did, ask Christ to do for you what you need most—forgiveness of your sins and reconciliation to God.

What If Judas Waited Three Days?

Judas, if you just would have waited, as you were climbing out on your branch, Jesus was falling beneath the weight of the cross and being pierced for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities. By his stripes we are healed. Judas, as your body was decomposing on the third day, Jesus' body was recomposing.

He was being regenerated, and the Holy Spirit resuscitated him and brought him back to life. And on the third day, Jesus walked out of the grave. Judas, if you just would have waited three days.

The resurrection makes all the difference. Do you remember what Jesus did after He rose from the dead? He went on a mission of restoration. Judas was not the only one who betrayed Jesus. All those disciples turned their back on Jesus and Jesus is all about grace.

Grace means that God loves you, and there is nothing you can do about it. Grace means that you get not just a second chance but a third, fourth, and so on. How many chances do you need? Grace means God's going to give it to you.

So, what does Jesus do? He begins seeking all those disciples who betrayed him and left him by himself. He finds most of them huddled in the Upper Room in fear. He appears in the room, "Peace be with you," Jesus says.

"Thomas is not here, I'll come back again." "Thomas, peace be with you, see where the nails were and where the spear went in my side. Now you can believe. Peter, you denied me not once, not twice, but three times, so I'm going to spend some extra time with you," Jesus says. "Do you love me, do you love me, do you love me?" And He restored each one of them.

Peter betrayed him three times; Judas, 30 pieces of silver. I think Jesus would have said to Judas 30 times, "Do you love me, do you love me, do you love me, do you love me." By the time Jesus got to 30, Judas would have been living out his name, Praise be to God.

Which do you choose? Judas, that is an attractive option. The idea that somehow, we can clean up our own messes, that when we break something, we can fix it ourselves. There is something attractive about maybe I can just take care of this myself. I can do it myself. That's Judas.

STORY: Reminds me of a story I heard about Dr. Leonid Rogozov. He was assigned to Antarctica. He flew all the way to the South Pole, got there, a small, little community. He was the only doctor there so when he became sick and he wasn't getting better, he self-diagnosed himself with appendicitis. He was within days of his appendix bursting. He decided to operate on himself.

He put together his own makeshift medical team. Got the meteorologist—you're going to hold the clamps. Got the driver—you're going to hold the mirror for me. And he put them together. He even taught them CPR in case he started to go out, they could bring him back so he could finish the surgery.

So, on that day the doctor was also the patient, and he through weakness, through fever, two hours of navigating through the incision, found it, removed it, stitched himself back up, and guess what? He survived.

CONCLUSION

You hear a story like that, and you can't help but respect the courage to admire the incredible strength that that would take. There's even a little bit of inspiration that happens. We get lulled into this idea: If I'm just strong enough, if I'm just courageous enough, I can deal with the problems in my life.

No, we can't. Because our problem is deeper than we ever imagined. When we realize that our problem is sin and that sin has been downloaded onto the hard drive of every single one of our hearts, and we can't get in there and we can't get it out. No matter what we try and do, we can't remove it. We cannot do our own soul surgery. There is only one great physician; he's the only One qualified to deal with what's going on with us.

So, we must reject the Judas way of life. I can do it myself. We must find the way that says, "**It is finished**" That's the cross, that's Jesus.

In Colossians 2:13-15, Paul is explaining all the things that Jesus did for us on the cross.

"When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, 14having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. 15And having disarmed the

powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.”

Do you see all the things done for you by Jesus on the cross? We were dead but he has made us alive. We have been forgiven. Our debts have been canceled, taken away, triumphed over on the cross. Done for you. That’s Jesus.

When it says that he has canceled everything we have done, that means everything. My worst moment, your worst moment, as far as the east is from the west, will be remembered no more. That’s Jesus.

we have two options. Which one do you choose? The way of remorse, or the way of repentance? Death, or life? For those who want grace, for those who want a new beginning, for those who want a second, third, or fourth chance, there is only one choice, and that choice is Jesus.