



He Said He'd Be Back

by Rev. Jerry L. McGlone

Luke 22:1-6

Now the feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called the Passover. And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to put [Jesus] to death; for they feared the people.

Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve; [Judas] went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray [Jesus] to them. And [the chief priests] were glad, and engaged to give [Judas] money. So [Judas] agreed, and sought an opportunity to betray [Jesus] to [the chief priests] in the absence of the multitude.

When last we saw the devil, he was slithering off. He had tried to tempt Jesus in the wilderness. He had offered comfort, and wealth, and power; but Jesus had beaten him at every turn. The devil went away.

But when he was on his way out the door, he said he'd be back. He'd be back when the time was right. He'd be back when Jesus was most vulnerable. He'd be back when Jesus was at his low point. He said he'd be back at the opportune time. [Luke 4:13]

And here it is. The devil came back. He came back when he thought his chances were the best. The devil figured he wouldn't be able to get to Jesus directly, so he took an alternate route. He thought he could circle in around behind him and get to Jesus through one of his best friends. When the devil came back, he came at Jesus through Judas.

Judas was the fellow who opened up the door and let the devil back in. Today I want to take a look at Judas and see what can be learned from this guy who let the devil back in.

A poet once wrote that Judas was “a city full of spirits, and they riot[ed] in the streets.” Knowing what we know about him, looking back on his life after having seen the end of it; we know that Judas was a man filled with conflicting emotions and thoughts. He had both good and bad impulses inside, uplifting ideas and down-grading emotions. They were all there, mixed-up together, sometimes fighting each other, always wanting to escape the dark places and get out into the light of day.

We know that because we can look back on his life, but when Jesus first met him, when the future was open, when emotions were clear and bright - back at the beginning, Judas was a good guy.

That may sound a little strange to you, but Judas started out a good guy. He was drawn to Jesus from the start. He wanted to be around Jesus. He wanted to learn from Jesus. At the beginning, and maybe right up to the end, Judas loved Jesus.

And, Jesus loved Judas. Never forget this part of the story. Out of all the people who kept coming around and following Jesus, Judas was chosen by Jesus to be one of the twelve. Jesus sent Judas out to preach in his name, to heal the sick, to tell the good news. Judas did all of that. He went. He preached. He healed. He taught. People believed in Jesus because of what Judas said and did. Judas was a good witness for Jesus.

The scripture also tells us that Jesus trusted Judas enough to make him the treasurer for the disciples. Judas was in charge of all their money. He paid all their bills. He kept track of all their expenses. Judas was a good man, a hard worker, a trusted friend; and he was drawn to be with Jesus.

From the beginning, Judas was probably filled with conflicting emotions, torn between what is right and what is wrong, pulled in different directions. When he met Jesus, Jesus provided him with a purpose and direction.

You know the best times of life always arrive when you have a goal in mind, a purpose; when you are driven to achieve or acquire or produce something specific. That’s what Jesus provided for Judas - a specific goal - and for a while, that goal kept all those competition emotions in check.

How many of you are familiar with the Ira Levin novel and the 1960’s movie called *Rosemary’s Baby*? One of the great scenes has Rosemary dismantling the closet at the end of her hallway. When she breaks through the back of her closet, she enters her neighbor’s apartment. Lining the walls of her neighbor’s apartment are several pieces of art: paintings of fiery deaths, of

destruction, of hatred and evil. As soon as you and Rosemary see those pictures, you all know you've entered into some kind of hell.

What kind of pictures do you hang on the walls of your home? Do you hang pictures of toxic waste dumps, of crime in the streets, of suffering and heart-break? No, I suspect you hang pictures of beauty on your walls, pictures that make you smile, that bring out good thoughts and happy memories. You hope that unconsciously the beauty and serenity of the art on your walls will sink into your life.

In much the same way, you hope your leader's influences will sink into your life:

- that your leader will paint some beautiful picture on your soul, - that your leader will point you in the right direction,
- that your leader will instill in your heart the desire for goodness and justice, for kindness and right,
- that your leader will control all those conflicting emotions in your mind and point you toward the ultimate goal.

That's what a true leader will do. He will excite us with inspiration. He will paint a masterpiece across the vistas of our minds, coloring our imaginations with a glimpse of the people we can yet become.

That's what Jesus did for Judas. That's what Jesus can do for you, too.

But then, something happened. Somewhere along the line, those imaginings weren't enough, those masterpieces crumbled, that inspiration failed to excite. Something happened inside of Judas and that good man turned bad.

That spells bad news for people like us. We don't like to think that it's possible to be so close to Jesus - and yet betray him. We don't want to consider that one of his best friends could hand him over to the police. We don't want to accept that love and devotion could turn into deceit and treachery.

But here it is. It did happen. It can still happen. It could even happen to you!

Why did he do it? There are all sorts of theories out there about what caused Judas to betray Jesus. We will never know for sure, but I want to give you one possibility.

I think he did it because the timing was right. It sounds so simple, but most of the trouble most of us get into starts out that way. I think Judas was

tempted just at the time when he was the most vulnerable, when his spirit was the weakest, when his defenses were down.

That's when most of us slip up and fall. Normally, we're strong enough. We can brush aside every temptation with relative ease. We can rise above our troubles. We can beat back every enticement. We can be strong and safe.

But once in a while we get caught with our defenses down:

- maybe we're tired or angry,
- maybe we're depressed or feeling lonely,
- maybe we're resentful or irritated,

and right at that moment, the devil slithers up and tempts us with the exact thing we think we want. That's when we give in to some private betrayal.

The devil comes knocking on the door when you're too tired, or too mad, or too something to be careful.

Instead of being on guard,

- instead of going to the door and peeking out the peep hole to see who's there,

- instead of putting on the chain before you crack the door open -

- instead of any of that -

- you just stay on the couch and yell out,

“Come on in!”

And the devil just walks right on in.

It may have been right at a discouraged time, a bitter time, an angry time when the devil came calling. We don't really know what was going on in him, but it was right at that time when the devil walked right into Judas' life. At that moment, that good man became a traitor.

What a sobering message that is to everyone who is trying to walk in Jesus' path. It is possible to be close to Jesus, to be his friend, and still betray him.

But that didn't have to be the end of the story for Judas. That didn't have to be the final word, because no matter what he did, no matter what his actions started, no matter what - Judas could have been a man, forgiven.

There is no doubt that if Judas had gone back to Jesus and asked for forgiveness, that Jesus would have forgiven him. This could have been the ending of the story. No matter what the mistake, no matter how dark the sin, no matter how deep the betrayal - you can not sin so deeply that Jesus will not forgive you.

Two friends were on vacation down in San Juan, Puerto Rico. They rented a fishing boat to take them out deep-sea fishing. The captain of the boat was an old navy officer who kept up a running commentary the whole trip.

An hour out at sea, the captain said they were over the “Puerto Rican trench.” That, he said, is an incredibly deep canyon on the ocean floor.

It was a beautiful day out on the ocean. The sea was calm. The waves were gentle. The sky was blue. Once in a while they saw a dolphin playing in the water. As they were enjoying the beauty and the tranquillity of what they saw on the surface, the captain reminded them that down on the ocean floor - some five and a half miles straight down - were some of the most grotesque, misshapen creatures ever created. More than 28,000 feet below the surface of the ocean, down there in the blackness and the muck, were shocking creatures almost never seen by human eyes.

Once in a while, some underwater storm would disturb them and belch them up from their black pit. On the surface you see beauty and order. On the surface the waters are placid and sparkling. But deep down, hidden and unnoticed, are all those unknown, ugly creatures.

As the captain described the strangeness and complexity of the sea, with all its dark, uncharted depths; the fishermen knew they were hearing a description - not just of the sea, but a description of themselves: men with placid, calm surfaces; and frightening, unknown depths.

These are things we don't like to talk much about, but they're there. We all have had enough sleepless nights and wanderings of our minds to know that there are there inside of us - those deeply hidden forces, those shadows of ugly, misshapen creatures - those terrible people we may yet become. Perhaps that's what it was like for poor Judas.

Out on the boat, up on the surface far above the Puerto Rican trench, those fishermen cast out their lines. One man hooked a fish. For thirty minutes he struggled and fought with that fish. His friend shouted encouragement and advice about how to land that monster. The creature pulled and yanked. It struggled and fought. None of the fishermen ever caught a glimpse of that fish. And after a hard fought thirty minutes, the line broke and the creature swam away. It's power could no longer be felt on the line.

What it was, they never knew. It might have been some wild surface fish - or it might have been some awful creature from deep down on the ocean

floor. “No telling what it was,” the captain said, “only thing we know for sure is that -

- whatever it was -

- we couldn’ t handle it!”

Poor Judas, the tragedy of his story is that he thought his sin was so great that Jesus couldn’ t handle it.

Well, the good news is: there’ s not a thing you can do that Jesus can’ t handle!

Whatever the sin,

whatever the evil,

whatever nasty thing comes creeping its way up out of
the depths of your life -

Jesus can handle it.

His forgiveness is so strong, so full, so complete - that it can repair whatever damage you might do to your soul.

Whatever awful thing may rise to the surface - there is a sure forgiveness waiting through Jesus Christ your Lord.

Because of that, you can meet tomorrow without fear.

Because of that, you can remember yesterday without regret.

Because of that, you can live today with confidence.

Because Jesus Christ keeps coming back to seek and to save the lost.