

March 23, 2016

Jesus!

*Jesus Betrayed!*

Matthew 26:1-5, 14-16

**Opening words:** There are 52 weeks every year. Each one is important and not a single one should be wasted. What have you done this week? Have you ever stopped to consider how many weeks have occurred in the history of the world? However, there is one week that changed our world forever: Holy Week! On the Christian calendar Holy Week is the last week of Lent, beginning on Palm Sunday and ending at dawn on Easter. It is the week the church remembers the final days of Jesus's earthly ministry. This is Holy Wednesday. Some call it "Spy Wednesday" because it was the day Judas Iscariot agreed to betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. Let me call this message *Jesus Betrayed!*

**Matthew 26:1-5, 14-16** When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, <sup>2</sup>"As you know, the Passover is two days away—and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified."

<sup>3</sup> Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, <sup>4</sup> and they schemed to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him. <sup>5</sup>"But not during the festival," they said, "or there may be a riot among the people."

<sup>14</sup> Then one of the Twelve—the one called Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priests <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

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From the very beginning he was destined for greatness. At the age of 14, he ran away from home to fight in the French and Indian War. At the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, he joined the American colonial army. He was given the rank of colonel and served with Ethan Allen. Together, they were given the credit for capturing Fort Ticonderoga. Later, he led 1000 men into Canada where he fought in the battle of Quebec. His courage in battle won him a promotion to brigadier general. His future looked bright, and then something went horribly wrong. Thoughts of compromise ate away at his patriotic zeal. Soon the unthinkable happened. He offered his services to the British, and in 1780 devised a plan to surrender West Point to them. You know his name: Benedict Arnold, the most notorious traitor in American history.

This evening we come to remember the most notorious traitor in the history of the world: Judas Iscariot. You know his name. You have heard it many times in the past. He was one of the twelve disciples. That means he had experienced the same things as the other eleven disciples. They had been through so much together. Jesus, himself, had hand selected the group. They had sacrificed and ministered together. They had

heard Jesus' teachings together. They had witnessed the miracles together. They had felt the power of the Master's presence together. They had dreamed of the future together. He was a trusted member of the group. He was their treasurer! (John 12:6) You know the truth. Judas Iscariot may be the greatest traitor in the history of the world. Yet, in spite of his notorious role in the Gospel narrative, people still, 2,000 years later, have compassion on him. They have grace on him because he played the part in the drama that no one else wanted. Just think about it for a moment. Without Judas Iscariot, there would have been no crucifixion or resurrection. Without Judas Iscariot, there would be no atonement or hope of eternal life. I have wrestled with this line of thought for years. So let me ask you this question:

Why did Judas Iscariot do it? Why did Judas Iscariot betray Jesus? We have several options.

1) Maybe Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus because he was the only non-Galilean? Iscariot is not a last name. It was his birth place. He was from Kerioth. Maybe he got tired and bitter from being the odd man out?

2) Maybe Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus to save his own skin? He knew in the political game of the day that the Romans were a safer bet. Jesus was a long shot.

3) Maybe Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus because of old fashioned greed? Thirty pieces of silver doesn't sound like much, but change it into today's money. I once read it equaled \$10,000 in today's currency. What would you do this evening to make a quick \$10,000?

4) Maybe Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus because he grew to hate Jesus? He wasn't part of the inner circle. Peter, Andrew, James and John got more attention and were privileged to more information. What made them better than him?

5) Maybe Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus because of politics? Iscariot was not only a derivative of the Hebrew "Ish Kariot" (man of Kerioth). It was also a form of the Greek word that meant "Dagger Bearer." Now, the Dagger Bearers were a band of violent nationalists who were prepared to use every means available to them, including assassination, to free Palestine from Roman rule. Perhaps Judas had set his hopes on a Messiah who would deliver his people from his oppressors. And then in bitter disappointment, he betrayed him.

6) Maybe Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus because he was hoping to force his hand? He saw the Master's power, but things were moving too slowly. He never intended for Jesus to die that day. He assumed Jesus would fight back. The problem was, Jesus did not fight back. The Master sacrificed himself.

Why did Judas Iscariot betray Jesus? We will never really know. The only thing we really know is that Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus. That was not a wise choice. He lived

to regret it. In the chapter beyond our reading, Matthew 27, we are told that Judas Iscariot regretted his choice to betray Jesus so much that he committed suicide; he hung himself. Matthew 27:3-4 says, once Jesus was handed over to the Roman governor, Pilate, Judas Iscariot tried to return the money. The problem was, it was too late. According to the text, Judas Iscariot threw the money into the temple and left to hang himself. The authorities used the money to buy a plot for him to be buried.

So what can we learn from the most notorious traitor in the history of the world? Consider these four things. Maybe someday we will look at them in detail.

**First, sin never delivers what it promises.**

**Second, it is possible to be near Christ and still not be truly saved.**

**Third, we are responsible for our own decisions.**

**Fourth, remorse is not the same as repentance.**

If one of those four speaks to you say, **"Amen!"**

One of the names almost lost in American history is Rose O'Neal Greenhow. She lived near the White House in Washington D.C. during the Civil War. She cultivated friendships with the rich and powerful of her day. She knew presidents, senators and high ranking military officers. They trusted her, so they shared some privileged information with her. Later, they were shocked to find out she was a Confederate spy. The Confederates used her information to defend Richmond, and they used that information to win the First Battle of Bull Run. Her story really is amazing. She died in 1864, trying to outrun the Union blockade near Wilmington, North Carolina. She drowned because of the \$2000 in gold coins sown into her underclothes. Since victors always write history, there is no other way to say it. Rose O'Neal Greenhow was a traitor! How close was Jesus' traitor? He was so close he betrayed Jesus with a kiss.

May God be with us as we continue this Holy Week pilgrimage together. Let us pray...