

## Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

### Sermon Series: Role Players in the Spotlight

#### **The Closed Heart (Judas Iscariot)**

Study #3

**Introduction:** There's just something about that name...

In 1970, Bill Gaither wrote a chorus with the memorable line,  
*"There's just something about that name..."*

The point of the song was that there is something about the name of Jesus. It is sweet to those of us who know Him.

But, more generally, there is truly something about a name.

Parents spend lots of time thinking of what name to give their about-to-be-born child.

Doing a little searching this week led to the discovery that among the more popular names for girls these days are Sophia, Emma, Olivia, Isabella, Lilly, Zoe, Chloe, Mia, and Madison.

For boys, among the leading names are Aiden, Jackson, Ethan, Liam, Mason, Noah, Lucas, Jayden, Jack, Logan, and Ryan.

Under the girls list were some notable absences. I didn't find Delilah or Jezebel. Among the more popular boys' names I didn't find Adolf. And I didn't find Judas.

The name of Jesus moves us to worship. Today we look at a man whose name makes our skin crawl.

### Learning ABOUT Judas

#### **Identifying the "Judas" in Question**

Just as was true for Mary and Simon, so there are several people named "Judas" in the New Testament.

None of them are major players, so it is never hard to figure out which Judas is the Judas under consideration today.

But one of Jesus' half-brothers, a child of Joseph and Mary, was named Judas. (Matthew 10:4; Mark 6:3)

Judas (in Luke 6:16) was also the name of another one of the twelve apostles, the brother of James the lesser. In other places, he is known as Thaddaeus (in Matthew and Mark).<sup>1</sup>

And there were others.<sup>2</sup>

But our focus today is the Judas we all think of when we hear the name, Judas. Judas Iscariot.

There are a number of theories as to what "Iscariot" means, but the most probable is that it refers to a town in Judea named "Kerioth," located just to the west of the Dead Sea, about forty miles south of Jerusalem.

Thus Judas was "*a man (Hebrew for man is ish) from Kerioth.*"<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This Judas questioned Jesus at the Last Supper (John 14:22) about how it was that Jesus was going to disclose Himself to them and not to the world.

<sup>2</sup> *Judas* was the name of a man from Galilee who led quite a following of people. His movement amounted to nothing - so Gamaliel (Acts 5:37). Saul of Tarsus stayed at the home of a man named *Judas* in Damascus after he had been blinded. (Acts 9:11) Another *Judas* (also called Barsabbas) was in on the very important Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) and was commissioned, along with Silas, by the Council to tell the decision of the Council to the churches. (Acts 15:27, 32)

<sup>3</sup> Other suggestions: (1). He came from the town of Karton, in Galilee; (2). Iscariot is related to the word for a leather bag, referring to the money purse he carried as apostolic treasurer; (3). Iscariot is closely related to the Hebrew word for strangling, in which case it would have been a nickname given after his death; (4). Iscariot is also closely related to the Hebrew word for dagger, implying that Judas might have been a Zealot (a recognized political party).

Assuming that this is the case, it would make Judas the only one of Jesus' apostles who came from the more influential (and presumably the more righteous) southern region of Judea. All the others were from Galilee, the northern section of Palestine.

We know nothing of Judas' life before he enters the Jesus story. Nothing of his family,<sup>4</sup> nothing of his background, nothing of his personality. Some have wondered if Judas was a member of the Zealot party or if he was a follower of John the Baptist. We simply do not know.

All we know about Judas is based on a few tidbits provided in a few verses in the Gospels. Those verses tell us enough, though, to help us get something of a handle on who the man was.

One thing we know is that Jesus chose Judas Iscariot to be one of His twelve apostles.

### **Chosen to be an Apostle (Matthew 10; Mark 3; Luke 6)**

Let's not miss this.

In each of the Gospels that have a list of the twelve apostles, Judas is mentioned (and yes, he is mentioned *last* in all three lists). But after spending an entire night in prayer to God (Luke 6:12), Jesus very intentionally chose Judas to be with Him.

Prior to being chosen as one of the elite twelve, Judas was probably part of the larger group that tagged along after Jesus (although we can't be sure about that). He and Jesus would have gotten to know each other at least somewhat in that first year of His public ministry.

We wonder what it was about Judas that prompted Jesus' choice? Did Judas show leadership potential? Was he responsible? Did he, as a Judean, stand out from the Galileans in some way? Again, we don't know.

All we know is that when it came time to select the twelve, Jesus chose and His choice included Judas Iscariot.

That means that for two years Judas traveled with the rest of the apostolic band, saw Jesus' miracles, and heard His teachings.

We can assume that Judas was like the others, dressed like the others and (except for that annoying southern Judean nasal twang) talked like the others.

We also know that once the apostolic band was in place, Judas was placed in a very responsible position. He served as the group's treasurer.

### **Selected Treasurer (John 12)**

*Why a treasurer?*

It's not that the group had to have officers. There wasn't a chairman and a vice-chairman and a secretary to go along with the treasurer.

But a treasurer was needed to take care of the group's finances.

A group of thirteen men (along with a few women at some points; and perhaps a few others from time to time) required some cash reserves and someone to manage the cash flow.

So, John's Gospel tells us that Judas [12:6] **had the money box**. Into that box went money that some women donated to Jesus' cause (See Luke 8:1-3), and perhaps money from other sources.

*Why not Matthew, the former tax-collector?*

I find it somewhat odd that Judas was the treasurer. If there was a need for someone to handle the money, wasn't there a perfectly logical choice among the Twelve? Who better at knowing how to handle money than Matthew/Levi, the former tax-collector? Why not choose Matthew?

Was Matthew overlooked precisely because of his past shady dealings with money? Then again, he had changed...

So was Matthew approached, but declined out of concern that he would fall into bad, old habits?

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<sup>4</sup> His father, Simon, was also from Kerieth. (John 13:26)

By whatever means, the responsibility for the group's finances fell to Judas.

*What was it about Judas that led to this appointment?*

Whether he volunteered or all the others declined leaving only him to accept the role by default, we'll never know.

But certainly his role as treasurer speaks of the group's general respect of him, of their sense that he would do a good job of managing the money. He had a reputation for honesty.<sup>5</sup>

That's Judas.

This morning we'll see Judas in a couple of narratives that took place in the last week of Jesus' life that open a window for us to see more of his character.

That first window involves an act of adoration and worship to which Judas objected very strongly.

This event occurred six days before the Jewish Passover. In other words, it was six days before Jesus was to be crucified. The setting is the Bethany home of Jesus' good friends, Mary and Martha and Lazarus.

It was in this home that Jesus and the twelve would spend their nights during the week leading up to Passover. Six days before the big day, as Jesus was eating supper, Mary was overtaken with a desire to honor Jesus.

### **Stands Out as an Objector (John 12)**

*Mary anoints*

***[3] Mary then took a pound of very costly perfume of pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.***

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<sup>5</sup> At the very least we can say that he did not have a reputation for dishonesty!

Knowing Mary, we aren't shocked at this act of devotion. We think it's pretty cool. Jesus certainly appreciated it and praised her for what she did.

But there was one present who wasn't at all pleased.

*Judas objects*

***[4] But Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples, who was intending to betray Him, said, [5] "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and given to poor people?"***

We hear Judas' objection and are drawn to admit, "You know, he's got a point."

Lots of poor people would have been helped by the proceeds from the sale of this expensive perfume.

Listen to Jesus' response to Judas - (paraphrased) "*Back off, Judas. Mary's doing right by Me. She's giving me a pre-burial anointing.*"<sup>6</sup>

It certainly wasn't that Jesus didn't care for the poor. He did! But He also knew that chances to honor Him shouldn't be passed by.

And John wants you and me to know that had the perfume been sold, the poor would not have benefitted!

As altruistic and benevolent and generous as Judas' words sound, he actually had something else in mind.

*Motive revealed*

***[6] Now he said this, not because he was concerned about the poor, but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box, he used to pilfer what was put into it.***<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> [7] Therefore Jesus said, "Let her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of My burial. [8] "For you always have the poor with you, but you do not always have Me."

<sup>7</sup> There is really only one interpretation to be put upon the words, "**he used to pilfer what was put into it.**" - Judas stole from the common funds.

### He didn't care about the poor

Remember, John is writing this account decades after the event. He has had time to process what happened in Mary's home and has come to some firm conclusions.

First, Judas didn't give a hoot about the poor.

That is a pretty serious charge to bring against a man who followed Jesus. It shows that Judas didn't catch the heart of Jesus for the poor. Jesus cared very, very much for the poor. Not Judas.

### He was a thief

Second, Judas was a thief. This is, by the time he sat down to write, John's studied conviction about who Judas was.

No doubt neither he nor any of the rest thought Judas was a thief when they were together. Why would they make a thief their treasurer!?<sup>8</sup>

But, again, by the time John sat down to write his Gospel, it has all become clear.

### He stole money from the money box

The money that went in to the money box never squared with the money that was available for the group's needs. The money was going somewhere, and that somewhere was Judas' pockets!

And just think about the money that he was taking for his own use.

This was not money given in response to emotional pleas in large group gatherings. It wasn't money given by the well-to-do or even money earned by the apostles, themselves.

This was money sacrificially given by a small group of women out of their own private means to support the cause of Jesus.

Judas took some of THAT money for himself.

So, Judas was a habitual thief, a repeat offender. It was his custom to skim off the top and take what wasn't his.

If the perfume Mary had used to anoint Jesus had been sold, the money wouldn't have gone to the poor. It would have gone directly to Judas, the apostle's CFO.

And THAT's Judas.

We now know that Judas lacked integrity. But that is not what comes to most of our minds when we think of Judas Iscariot. We think of him as the one who betrayed Jesus.

From early on in the ministry of Jesus it had been known that there was a traitor in the apostolic band. Jesus had told them so.

### **Judas, the Traitor**

*There is a traitor among the Twelve (see John 6)*

The first mention of a traitor among the twelve comes after Jesus' miracle of the feeding of the five thousand (near the close of John 6).

At this point the crucifixion was only about a year away. The crowds that had their bellies filled were wildly enthusiastic about Jesus. After all, He had just given them food. They wanted to make Him king!

And that, of course, was what EVERYONE expected Jesus to become. He would ascend to the throne of Israel. He would become the Messiah. He would restore the nation to its former glory.

But EVERYONE seriously misunderstood Jesus' mission. He hadn't come to earth to reign as king. He had come to offer Himself as a sacrifice and to live as a Servant.

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<sup>8</sup> As one of the articles I read says it, "*Judas must have been a clever scoundrel.*" - E. F. Harrison, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 105, #418, April - June, 1948, pp. 170-181.

So, to this crowd who wanted Him to wear a crown, He proceeded to give a sermon that was so strident, so harsh, that the crowds were all offended and left.<sup>9</sup>

Because of that one message in one day Jesus' followers dwindled from thousands to exactly twelve.

And far from apologizing, Jesus pressed the twelve with a challenging question - [67] *"You do not want to go away also, do you?"*

To which (who else?) [68] *Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. [69] We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy one of God."*

And then Jesus said, [70]... *"Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?"*

Interesting.

Notice where Jesus chose to reveal the presence of a traitor. He did it immediately after He had refused to take the path to the throne, a path that would have led to the fulfillment of His followers' fondest dreams.

It is when the possibility for disappointment in Him is greatest that Jesus alerts His followers to the presence of evil in their midst.

Now, we know that Jesus was talking about Judas Iscariot, but none of the twelve - not even Judas! - knew it at the time.

*Judas revealed to be the betrayer*

Actually, anyone who reads the Gospels knows VERY early that Judas will betray Jesus. When we are first introduced to the group of the apostles in Matthew (10) and Mark (3) and Luke (6), we are told that Judas was the one. So much for drama and suspense!

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<sup>9</sup> We call it "The Bread of Life" discourse. In this message Jesus identified Himself as the true "manna" (food) that God gives to satisfy people's deepest hunger for L-I-F-E in God. With increasing resistance from the crowds to this claim, He urged them to "eat" His flesh and "drink" His blood - a call to radical identification with Him through faith. It was this call that prompted the crowds to leave Him.

But at the beginning, there was no hint of the direction Judas would go. Through crisis after crisis, no suspicions rise.<sup>10</sup>

It is only at the end that he was revealed to be the one who would turn Jesus over to the Jews who would turn Him over to the Romans for crucifixion.

The course of the betrayal travels a clear path. We follow it through the Gospel story, beginning, for review, at the home of Mary and Martha and Lazarus, in Bethany.

*The act of betrayal*

The first anointing at the home of Mary (John 12)

As we have already seen, Jesus was anointed by Mary six days before Passover. She wiped the expensive perfume over His feet with her hair. It was an act of extreme devotion.

Judas objected, revealing not a heart for the poor, but his low esteem of Jesus AND his greed.

Then, four days later, Jesus was anointed again.<sup>11</sup>

The second anointing at the home of Simon the leper (Matthew 26; Mark 14)

*[Matthew 26:6] Now when Jesus was in Bethany, at the home of Simon the leper, [7] a woman came to Him with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume, and she poured it on His head as He reclined at the table.*

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<sup>10</sup> Jesus knew what was going on in Judas's heart, but the others didn't. It wasn't until after the fact that any of them put two and two together and came up with four. *[John 6:64]... For Jesus knew from the beginning why they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him.* We wonder what tipped Him off? Was it His omniscience at work, or were there subtle hints in Judas' behavior that revealed his character and leanings to an observant and wise Jesus?

<sup>11</sup> It is tempting to want to combine these two anointing into one, due to their similarities. But there are too many differences to be slightly differing accounts of the same event. Clearly, Jesus was anointed twice during the last week of His life by grateful followers.

This time He was in the home of Simon the leper. This time the woman who anointed Him is not named. This time an alabaster vial of very costly perfume was opened and the perfume was extravagantly poured over His head (not His feet).

And this time Judas is not singled out as the one who objected. At this anointing, several of the disciples saw this anointing in the same light as Judas had the earlier anointing in the home of Mary.

***[Matthew 26:8] But the disciples<sup>12</sup> were indignant when they saw this, and said, “Why this waste? [9] “For this perfume might have been sold for a high price and the money given to the poor.”<sup>13</sup>***

While it is not explicitly stated, it is not hard to imagine that Judas was one of those who objected to this second anointing. Nor should we be surprised to read what happened next.

#### Judas' shameful bargain

***[Matthew 26:14] Then one of the twelve, named Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests [15] and said, “What are you willing to give me to betray Him to you?” And they weighed out thirty pieces of silver to him. [16] From then on he began looking for a good opportunity to betray Jesus.<sup>14</sup>***

I'm convinced that Judas was prompted to plot Jesus' betrayal by this second anointing within the space of four days.

I think that these two events pushed Judas over the edge. He was fed up with Jesus' tactics.

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<sup>12</sup> Mark 14:4 says “*some of the disciples.*”

<sup>13</sup> Jesus was clearly pleased with what the woman had done and praised her for it. ***[10] But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why do you bother the woman? For she has done a good deed to Me. [11] “For you always have the poor with you; but you do not always have Me. [12] “For when she poured this perfume on My body, she did it to prepare Me for burial. [13] “Truly I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her.”***

<sup>14</sup> Zechariah 11:11-12 speaks of thirty shekels of silver as the price at which the good shepherd of Israel was valued by the people of his day, a very low valuation. This is prophetic of the price of Judas' bargain for turning Jesus over to the chief priests.

We seriously misread the Gospel accounts if we don't take the context into account. Judas' decision to turn Jesus over is directly and clearly linked to the two (in his mind, “wasteful”) anointings.

And as Matthew tells us, from that day forward Judas was keeping an eye out for a chance to turn Jesus over to the authorities.

The next day (Thursday evening), Jesus and his disciples celebrated the Passover together.

#### Dismissed to betray Jesus

By the time the Passover meal began, the plan was fully in place. John even tells us that it was Satan who had put it into Judas' heart to betray Jesus. (John 13:2) So, yes, Satan was involved. But Satan was clearly working with a very willing heart.

The time in the Upper Room began with Jesus washing the feet of the twelve. Jesus washed the feet of Judas Iscariot. He washed the feet of the man whom He knew was hours away from delivering Him over to a hideous death.

For the others, this foot-washing was a picture of future ministry and of daily cleansing from sin, their hearts having already been cleansed.

All the foot-washing did for Judas was to clean the dirt off of his feet. For him there would be no future ministry. His heart had never been cleansed by Jesus.

And with the foot washing complete, the meal could proceed. But before that, Judas had to be dismissed. He had to be set free to act out his treason. Jesus was not about to speak the words His followers needed to hear with the betrayer present.

When Jesus dismissed Judas, the message was given in such a way that its meaning might be missed.

Jesus told all of them, *[John 13:18] "...I know the ones I have chosen; but it is that the Scripture may be fulfilled, 'HE WHO EATS MY BREAD HAS LIFTED UP HIS HEEL AGAINST ME.'"*<sup>15</sup>

And then He promptly gave bread to Judas.

The other eleven apostles didn't seem to follow what was happening at the time (they all were wondering if Jesus had THEM in mind. "*Am I the one who will betray You?*"). They didn't connect the handing of the bread to Judas with His words about betrayal.

But Judas "got it." Upon receiving the bread, John tells us that Satan entered into him and he went from the Upper Room straight to the chief priests. Then we read, *[13:30] and it was night*. Sure, it was dark outside. John's point is that it was night in Judas' soul.<sup>16</sup>

Later that night Jesus and Judas met again, for the last time.

#### The deceitful kiss of betrayal

Back in the Upper Room, the Passover was wrapped up with the singing of a hymn. Then, Jesus led His (now) eleven apostles to the Garden of Gethsemane, a familiar spot just outside Jerusalem's walls.

He took Peter and James and John off by themselves to pray in advance of His own coming ordeal. There, Jesus sweated great drops of blood as He steeled Himself for the trial He knew was upon Him.

When He had finished praying, He woke up Peter, James, and John (they had fallen asleep!) to go join the others. As they were moving, they heard the sound of an approaching mob.

At the head of the crowd of soldiers bearing swords and chief priests and scribes with torches was Judas Iscariot.

Judas had told the rulers that he would give a sign, in advance, to identify Jesus in the dark garden.

So, as they were all standing together (John 18:5), Judas approached Jesus, greeted Him with, *[Matthew 26:49] "Hail Rabbi"* - and gave Him the respectful and loving greeting of a kiss.<sup>17</sup>

The ultimate betrayal - a kiss. As Michael Card has written so well in one of his songs, simply titled, "Why?"

*Why did it have to be a friend  
Who chose to betray the Lord?  
Why did he use a kiss to show them?  
That's not what a kiss is for.*

*Only a friend can betray a friend  
A stranger has nothing to gain.  
And only a friend comes close enough  
To ever cause so much pain.*<sup>18</sup>

With that kiss, Jesus was arrested and taken away for a night of trials and beatings and abuse, followed the next day - Good Friday - by scourging, final sentencing, and death by crucifixion for you and me.

We are given one final glimpse of Judas Iscariot.

#### **The End of Judas**

After he betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver and then saw that Jesus was condemned to death by crucifixion, he was filled with remorse.

He had, perhaps, never meant to harm Jesus so much as to just ensure that he, Judas, got what was coming to him. Seeing Jesus crucified was probably not what he had hoped would happen.

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<sup>17</sup> The seizure in the garden is told at some length by John, yet he alone omits the significant detail which is so prominent in the other accounts, the betraying kiss.

<sup>18</sup> This, from E.F Harrison: Judas' act of betrayal is bad enough in itself. The world instinctively dreads and hates a traitor, for treachery strikes at personal security and endangers the success of any enterprise in which others are associated with us. But the ugliness of Judas' act is heightened to a point beyond all comparison by reason of the person of Him against whom it was committed. He stands unique in his infamy simply because Jesus of Nazareth has no peer.

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<sup>15</sup> A quote from Psalm 41:9.

<sup>16</sup> Amazingly, the disciples didn't even then suspect Judas. Instead, they assumed that Jesus was giving Judas instructions about handling the group's finances. (v. 28)

So, Judas went back to the chief priests and returned the money. The rulers wanted nothing to do with it. It was blood money.

But Judas didn't want the money anymore. So he threw the thirty pieces of silver into the temple treasury.

And now Judas no longer had any place to go.

He could not go back to the disciples, having betrayed Jesus. He was not accepted by the chief priests. He couldn't even live with himself.

So, Matthew tells us of the sad end of Judas, with this - [27:5] *he went away and hanged himself.*<sup>19</sup>

Today, we have learned a bit *about* Judas Iscariot.

- He was an apostle of Jesus who never came to saving faith.
- He was trusted with the money purse, but wasn't trustworthy.
- He was, at heart, a thief who was offended at extravagant worship of Jesus, wishing only to use sacrificially given money to benefit himself.
- He was the one who betrayed Jesus to the rulers who were responsible for His crucifixion.

Now, after learning *about* him, what might we learn *from* Judas today?

First, we learn that nothing and no one can stand in the way of God's sovereign plan to redeem us.

### **Learning from Judas**

#### **The Power of God Overcomes the Schemes of the Devil**

Satan, who is a very real being who opposes all that God stands for, wanted nothing more than to see Jesus defeated. He wanted Jesus dead and gone.

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<sup>19</sup> Matthew tells us that the property bought with the thirty pieces of silver was called the Field of Blood because it was purchased with blood money. The sense from Luke's telling (Acts 1) is that it received its name from the bloody way in which Judas died. There are no doubt elements of both involved in its naming.

So, he played Judas' natural bent toward greed into what looked like the perfect script - a crucifixion plot. But Satan overplayed his hand. He didn't factor in God's ability to raise the dead.

And despite Judas' human-inspired and Satan-empowered betrayal, God still had the last word with Jesus' crucifixion sacrifice that won salvation for you and me AND His resurrection from the dead.

We serve a God whose will cannot be thwarted. He is sovereign and He is good. You can be at rest knowing that His purposes stand!

Second, Judas stands as a warning against a heart that is closed off to the life-changing power of God.

#### **Beware the Danger of a Closed Heart**

How do we often see Judas portrayed? He's lurking in the shadows, face twisted in anger, menacing eye-brows, unruly hair. In movies, he looks like he would fit perfectly on a Post Office "Most Wanted" printout.

But we look at the Gospels and are amazed at how normal Judas is. He fit in perfectly with the other apostles for three solid years.

Yet we now know that his heart was never truly opened to the truth of Jesus. Judas is the tragic example of a person who refused to lead a reflective life. He never allowed the message to penetrate.

Like hard-packed soil, the good seed never sank into his soul.

If Judas' life is a warning, heeding it would be wise. Heeding the warning would look like praying that God would give us grace to have hearts that are open and soft and receptive to Him.

Finally, the life of Judas illustrates the ultimate tragedy of gaining earthly treasure while losing our eternal souls.

#### **It Does no Good to Gain the Whole World and Lose Your Soul**

Judas was always looking out for Number One.



He wanted political power so he aligned himself with Someone he thought would take the throne. He wanted financial riches so he used the position of treasurer to line his pockets.

Then, when he saw that following Jesus would yield neither power nor wealth, he sold Jesus out for thirty pieces of silver.

Of course, he understood that Jesus offered other gifts - eternal life, forgiveness of sin, a life filled with meaning built on service and love - but he rejected all of that. That wasn't Judas' "thing."

So, sadly, Judas, who was always looking out for Number One, served himself poorly. In the end, he got what he wanted - thirty pieces of silver - and lost what he needed.

One time, Jesus warned His listeners that it was possible to gain the whole world and yet lose their eternal souls.

By trusting in Jesus for what He never promised to give - fame, riches, power - it is possible that some are doing just that today.

But when you enter into a relationship with God through trust in Jesus, you will not be disappointed - forever! He does give you what you most need and what you are really hungering for: eternal salvation, a new heart, purpose in life, ever-deepening relationships with others, and a growing relationship with God.

All that and more comes to the one whose heart is opened and receptive to receive Jesus by faith.