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Judas in Me

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As you read the Bible, do you ever find yourself identifying with the life or behavior of a specific Bible character? Sometimes you may identify with their good qualities and sometimes with their bad ones. It is likely that of all the Bible characters you have identified with, Judas has never been one of them. Yet, it may be that there is more of Judas in us than we would ever like to admit. If we are going to live the examined life of a good and faithful steward, we can learn and apply much from the tragic story of Judas. Here is the story of my sobering encounter with Judas.

I was attending one of my industry's conferences. One of the main speakers there made a passing comment in his presentation that froze me in that moment. The speaker said, "Judas betrayed Jesus for money," and then went on. I had known all my life that Judas had betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver, but for some reason it wasn't until that very moment that I connected those thirty pieces of silver to money—where I had spent most of my professional life. For the first time in my entire life, I found myself painfully identifying with Judas, the betrayer. Over my life, I have often related to Peter, too bold and carelessly impetuous, and to Samson, with his great strength but lack of self-control, and even to King Saul, who "played the fool." But never before had I ever seen myself in Judas, the betrayer—until that moment. It will be time well spent for us to dig deeper into this story to see what God might teach us about ourselves.

Judas the Betrayer

Matthew 26:15 (NASB) is a key passage where, under cover of darkness, Judas is negotiating with the Pharisees. Judas asks them, *'What are you willing to give me to betray Him to you?' And they weighed out thirty pieces of silver to him.* What exactly does it mean to " *betray*" someone? The word "betray" means to "turn someone over to another," the way a police officer would turn over a convict to a prison warden.

Has your behavior ever turned Jesus over to be mocked, ridiculed, or punished by another because you are leading a hypocritical, uncontrolled, self-centered life? Remember, Judas didn't kill Jesus; he only set Him up to be killed by others. Have you ever set Jesus up to be "crucified" by others? Another

detail in this story of Judas is worth noting. Only one Gospel writer records the actual price of Judas' betrayal: Matthew, the man whose previous career was the patently dishonest business of tax collecting. Matthew was well-acquainted with lying, stealing and cheating to get more money.

Apparently Matthew, of all four of the gospel writers, wanted us to know all the sordid financial details of Judas' treacherous deed. Maybe because of his own personal experience, he records these details to warn us (who might have a similar sinful inclination) not to fall prey to the same devastating temptation and delusion that Judas did. Maybe he wanted us to compare ourselves to this betrayer.

Judas the Traitor

Luke 6:16 calls Judas a traitor, meaning "someone who is false to a duty or an obligation." None of us would like to think of ourselves as traitors to Christ. But think about it: Have you ever been inconsistent in a duty and an obligation to Christ because His will and your will didn't align? Have you ever abandoned His plan for your own because your plan looked more profitable? Have you ever been guilty of dereliction of duty to him in your financial dealings with others? These sobering questions may bring to mind times in which you have indeed been a traitor to Him.

You may be thinking, "Surely I've not been as exceedingly disloyal to Jesus as Judas was. I mean, Judas had his price, right?" Yes, he did; what exactly was Judas' price? If you look at Exodus 21:32, you will see that thirty shekels (pieces) of silver was the standard price of an adult slave. (In Bible times, slaves were more like indentured servants or employees that worked in exchange for room and board.) Exodus 21:2 explains what the owner got when he bought a slave. It tells us, *If you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve for six years; but on the seventh he shall go out as a free man without payment*. Thus when a man bought a slave, he was, in effect, prepaying for six years of labor. If we assume our current minimum wage to be our version of modern-day "slave labor" and multiply that by six years of full time work, in today's dollars, Judas sold Jesus out for about $75,000.

It may be as we honestly reflect on our own Christian lives, the Holy Spirit might bring to our minds times in which we have been a betrayer or traitor to Jesus for a whole lot less than $75,000. Here are a few ways in which we might be acting a lot more like Judas than we would ever want to admit.

- Have you ever ÒembellishedÓ your deductions on a tax return in order to pay less in taxes?
- Have you ever intentionally failed to fully disclose all pertinent information to not lose a sale?
- Have you ever done a cash transaction and not reported the income?
- Have you ever overcharged someone or been undercharged and not corrected the financial error that was in your favor?
- Have you ever padded your expense account?
- Have you ever found yourself calculating ways to give less to the Lord by using some creative financial gymnastics to come up with your giving amount?
- Have you ever skipped worship to work and make more money?

This list could go on, and if not already, eventually something would inevitably hit a nerve in all of us. It would be time well spent for each of us to invite the Holy Spirit to bring to our minds when and

how we have betrayed Jesus and played His traitor for money. Spend some quiet time to meditate on these things.

Judas the Loser

One final observation will be important to consider, and it might just be the saddest part of the entire story of Judas. It will be a sad part of *our* story as well if and when we emulate him. Here it is: Judas didn't really betray Jesus for money: Judas *betrayed* himself for money. And in the end, he lost his money, he lost his life, and he lost his eternity. It was an entirely bad deal for him, and it will likewise be an entirely bad deal for us too whenever we, even in the smallest ways, choose to betray Jesus for money. Remember what Jesus asks in Matthew 16:26, *'For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?'*

Do not misunderstand the point of this lesson. It is not an attempt to make you feel like some kind of modern-day Judas. But when we see even the faintest likeness of Judas' moral and spiritual depravity in us, we all should be appropriately humbled and sincerely repentant when we see his pathetic likeness appearing in our personal or professional lives. May God give us all the strength to stay true to our commitment to Jesus *and* to living an examined life.

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