

THE GOSPEL MAGAZINE

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Incorporating the Protestant Beacon and The British Protestant

New Series

No. 1581

MARCH — APRIL 1995

Old Series

No. 2581

Editorial

ONE OF THE HARDEST THINGS in life is to wait patiently. We are so often too much in a hurry; we are impatient and cannot wait for results.

The disciples had to exercise restraint. One of the Lord's last words was "wait for the promise of the Father" (Acts 1:4). They themselves were eager to be up and doing, to prove themselves worthy of the trust committed to them. Theirs was an immense task; there was not a day to spare, yet they were to wait until the appointed time.

Scattered throughout the Bible are exhortations to wait upon the Lord. In Psalm 27:14 we are urged — "Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he will strengthen thine heart." Waiting on the Lord is a blessing in itself for it enables our faith to grow and develop. Simeon waited long years in order to see the Consolation of Israel. He was not disappointed and all the time his spiritual life was coming to fruition. He proved that waiting time was not wasted time.

To those who realise the inadequacies of their own resources and the feebleness of their own strength, there comes the reassuring word, "they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength". He promises to exchange our weakness for His strength. One of the reasons for our weakness is ignorance of the resources which are at our disposal; or failure to appropriate those resources. It is only as we cast ourselves upon the Lord that we can draw upon His unfailing strength. We need to heed that advice found in Hosea, "Wait on thy God continually". This is to be our daily attitude; it is one that God delights to honour.

Let us then pray for grace to wait, and thus experience the benediction, "Blessed are all they that wait for him" (Isaiah 30:18).

Judas Iscariot

A Sermon by the Editor

“Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, and said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him” (Matthew 26:14-16)

WHAT A PICTURE is conjured up in our minds by the very name of Judas Iscariot! It speaks of all that is traitorous and treacherous. A traitor is the very opposite of a loyalist, and the more we love loyalty, the more we loathe a traitor.

The history of the world has been stained by a succession of foul deeds, but the one that stands out so startling above all the rest is the betrayal of our Lord Jesus Christ by Judas, and by the sign that he gave — the kiss.

In a very real sense Judas is the supreme enigma of the New Testament. He is described in more than one place as “one of the twelve”. For three years he lived in the closest fellowship with our Lord Jesus Christ. He walked with Him — he talked with Him. They knelt together in prayer and yet, at the very end, he turned against Him and betrayed Him. Do you not see here a terrible warning that, when the devil sought a tool to do his desperate deed, it was not an outsider that he looked for? He did not select any Priest or Sadducee or Pharisee or Scribe, but he sought out Judas. No one was in a better position to betray Christ than one of the twelve. Let us get it into perspective, because Judas was not alone amongst the twelve for weakness of character. Not one of them was without his fault, and no attempt is made in the New Testament to conceal it. For instance, the vile temper of James and John, you remember, who wanted to call down fire on an inhospitable Samaritan village. It does not gloss over the spiritual blindness of Philip when the Lord had to remonstrate and say, “Have I been so long time with you, Philip, and yet hast thou not known me?”. He does not excuse, in any sense, the instability of Peter or the unbelief of Thomas, not to mention the pride and the jealousy of which they were all guilty because, you remember, they were all at different times wanting the chief place. Yet Judas stands out above the rest of them and few things were more grievous to our blessed Lord than to be betrayed by one of His own. I think the story of Judas is summed up in a phrase in Luke’s Gospel (22:3-4): “Then entered Satan into Judas surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve. And he went his way, and communed with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray him unto them.” It is wonderful sometimes how just a phrase out of the Bible will sum up a person’s character. “He went his way,” and we have to say it is doubtful if he ever went for any length of time in the way of Christ. “He went his own way.”

Now, at the very beginning of our Lord’s ministry, He chose twelve. He ordained twelve that they might be with Him. Yet we read a little further on in John’s Gospel that “Jesus knew from the beginning who it was who would

betray Him". But here, I think, we have to make a distinction between foreknowledge and foreordination. They are not the same thing. Foreknowledge does not limit one little bit man's responsibility. Foreknowledge and foreordination are two things and, notice, it was Judas of his own volition who deliberately betrayed Christ, and he acted for reasons of his own. To Judas, the call of Christ to join the twelve was an irresistible call, for it opened up to him unprecedented possibilities. Judas thought very much in terms of a temporal Messianic kingdom, and he welcomed the idea of a place by the King's side in glory, and Judas saw before him a wonderful opportunity for self-advancement. Fame and fortune were within his grasp. "He went his way."

It is interesting, too, that Judas is the only Judean member of the twelve. He came from Kerioth in southern Judaea. All the others were Galileans. So you had eleven from the north and one from the south, and Judas undoubtedly spoke with a different accent from the rest of them and possibly he felt on his own from the very beginning and perhaps there may have been within him a certain frustrated ambition . . . but the choice is something we cannot really understand. It raises questions that we have not got the minds to answer. I am reminded of an incident that happened many years ago. Dr. Joseph Parker was the once celebrated Minister of the City Temple in London and one of his congregation asked him why it was that Christ chose Judas, and the great preacher made this instant reply: "I have a greater puzzle than that. Why did Jesus choose me?" Well, it was his own way that Judas went, and if he thought first of all it was a way of glory, it turned out very much for Judas to be a way of greed.

Look again at the text. He went to the Jewish authorities and he said to them, "What will ye give me?". I think that reveals the secret of his sin, which was ultimately his ruin. "What will ye give me?" Oh! he had given much up for Christ's sake, but one thing he did not give up and that was his covetousness.

Judas, I think, was obviously a man of some business ability. He was financial secretary to the twelve but, alas, the accountant turned the embezzler and he pilfered from the common purse, but Judas could hide his greed under a cloak of piety. The other side of Judas' character comes to light in the story of the anointing by Mary of Bethany of the feet of Jesus. You remember that lovely incident when she came and brought a pound of spikenard, "very costly" says the writer, and she poured it over the feet of Jesus, and Judas, as though he was shocked by the extravagance said, "Why was not this ointment sold for more than three hundred pence and the proceeds given to the poor?". Oh! the hypocrisy of it all. The hypocrisy! How pious it sounds! How very practical it appears! But, listen to what John says in the next verse: "Not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief and kept the bag." Oh! he could speak the language of Canaan and yet be in the very depths of Egypt! And no doubt there were times when the disciples were puzzled as to why the common fund was always running low — and I do not think they were troubled, as we are today, by the spiralling cost of things — but they must have wondered why it was always needing replenishing. Yet it seemed inconceivable that one of their own number

could steal from the common fund, but not very long afterwards they remembered and understood.

Judas kept the bag. Perhaps Judas argued with himself that, in recognition of his position as treasurer, he deserved some remuneration and, in the absence of an honorarium, he helped himself. But ultimately it was his love of money on which he made shipwreck. I wonder, years afterwards when Paul wrote those words, "The love of money is the root of all evil", did he have in mind Judas Iscariot? For Paul goes on in 1 Timothy 6:10: "which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." That was true of Judas, He pierced himself through. But this was his own doing. The history of the Bible abounds in illustrations on this theme. It was for money that Joseph was sold by his brethren to the Midianite merchantmen and ultimately into Egypt. It was for money that Samson was sold to the Philistines. It was for gold that Achan brought almost disaster on the Israelites when they were just about to go into the Promised Land. And in the New Testament it was for money that Ananias and Sapphira tried to deceive Peter. Also for money Christ was sold into the hands of wicked men.

Now, money is enormously useful, but it is so terribly dangerous. We cannot do without it. Even the Church needs money to keep it going, but how we need to be on our guard against the love of money. We need to beware of making an idol of money, making it the be-and-end-all in our lives, and, you see, it is possible to love money without having very much of it and, on the other hand, you can have money and yet not love it. But here it stands as a warning that the love of money is the root of all evil. Once let it get the mastery, it will harden you. It will gripe your spiritual life. It will wither your soul. Now, our daily prayer should be that lovely word in Proverbs 30:8: "Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me."

"What will ye give me?" was the question that Judas asked. Money was his god. The promised kingdom seemed to be receding. Christ had grown sad as the cross drew near. The enemies of Christ, on the other hand, were jubilant. Judas noted these things and he realised that Christ's way and his way were not parallel paths. "Judas went his way." He thought it was a way of glory. It was very much the way of greed.

But notice, thirdly, it was the way of guilt. Come with me to the institution of the Lord's Supper in the upper room — you remember how they were all gathered together for the last time. Now, at an Eastern feast the offering of a sop by the host was recognised as a mark of honour, and that is exactly what Christ did at the Last Supper. He gave to Judas the sop, as it was called. There it was the last thing, offering out friendship to him, and Judas made a pretence at that very moment when he was about to deliver Christ into the hands of His bitterest enemies. Yes, "he went out" and, says John, "it was dark". Oh! how vivid it all is! Darkness was in the soul of Judas. "He went out." Now the others did not know where he was going. John explicitly says that they thought he had been sent by the Master to buy sufficient provision for the feast, or that he had been sent out to dispense some

alms to the poor. They would never have let him go if they had known what he was about to do, but, says Luke, "he went his way", and you know what happened afterwards. Remorse played havoc with his conscience. His hopes and his plans were completely broken and he ended in a suicide's death. The New Testament draws a veil over the end of Judas in this remarkable phrase: "And he went to his own place."

We must give him credit for this, that in the end his sense of guilt was stronger than his love of money, which hitherto had been his dominant passion. He was now overcome with a sense of guilt. Judas struck one of the most dreadful bargains of all history and the reward was so dreadfully out of proportion with the deed that he did, but it comes to this that Judas had a divided allegiance. Do you remember how our Lord said, "It is not possible to serve God and mammon"? Here is an outstanding instance — and a divided allegiance can only end in disaster. Judas fell an easy prey to the tempter.

Well, what about the end? I think we could just say, for him, repentance came too late. Matthew says, "He went and repented himself" and yet it does not seem to be the real thing, for why does it say in the Acts of the Apostles, "He went to his own place"? Oh yes, he went to the priest, you remember, and he threw the money down and said, "I have sinned, I have betrayed the innocent blood", but it was not a true repentance, not the genuine article. Oh! beware of trusting your last minute repentance. "Behold now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation."

Let me draw out quickly one or two plain lessons, as I close, from the story of Judas, and the warning that we find so clearly put before us in the Bible.

The first lesson is that right environment and spiritual privileges of themselves are insufficient. Judas had the highest of privileges. He was an apostle. He was a companion of Christ. He was an eye witness of the miracles. He had a marvellous attachment to the Saviour. He saw what Abraham and Moses and David and Isaiah never saw; he was a fellow-labourer with Peter, James and John; and yet, to what purpose? Surely, Judas stands as a warning beacon to the Church of Christ, and it tells us this — to resolve not to be content with anything less than a thorough change of heart. Oh! it is only too possible to be in the visible Church and yet not really to belong to Christ. That is the first lesson. Right environment and spiritual privileges of themselves are insufficient.

The second lesson is what a small value some men put on Christ. The reward was out of proportion to the deed he did — thirty pieces of silver. The Old Testament says that thirty pieces of silver was the price of a slave. This was the estimate that Judas had of Christ. I ask you, "What is your estimate of the value of Christ?" Surely it cannot be added up. We can only say with the writer of the Song of Solomon that "He is the chiefest among ten thousand and the altogether lovely one".

The third lesson is opportunities persistently spurned will lead to disaster. Who could have had more opportunity than Judas for believing and trusting in Christ? Yet to what purpose?

The fourth lesson is all of us are known for something. What was the memorial that Judas left behind? Well, oddly enough, the only memorial he left was a cemetery, because he threw the pieces of money into the temple and it was classed as dirty money, the price of blood. They wouldn't accept it, so they bought with it a field in which to bury strangers, called *Aceldama* — and that was the only memorial that Judas left. I mentioned a moment or two ago about Mary and the anointing and the Lord said: "Let her alone, against the day of my burial has she done this, and wherever the Gospel is preached, this shall be her memorial." What a contrast! Some men are noted for good deeds and honoured through all generations, but Judas is notorious for his shame. *What testimony will you leave behind?*

The fifth lesson is "let he that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall". Seek to have no confidence in yourself. Our only confidence must be in Christ and He will keep us safe to the end. The apostle Paul could say: "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." One writer has suggested that whenever we are mercilessly hurling things at Judas we should remember that our Lord said: "He that is without sin, let him cast the first stone."

Here is a very solemn character — Judas Iscariot — summed up in this question, "What will ye give me?", and Luke's phrase, "He went his way".

These things are written for our learning and may we learn much from our study of Judas Iscariot, for His Name's sake. Amen.

M.H.

For Younger Readers

CARINE MACKENZIE

MAKER'S INSTRUCTIONS

HAVE YOU EVER HAD a new electrical gadget delivered to your home? Perhaps a new washing machine or vacuum cleaner? We bought a new carpet cleaner in the sales. It looked very complicated: levers to adjust the height; buttons to change the suction; extra fittings for reaching awkward corners. Before we could use it properly we had to sit down and study the maker's instruction book. Only then could we use the machine properly — only then was the vacuum cleaner doing what the maker had designed it to do.

If we want to live our lives as our Maker intended us to, we have to study His instruction book too — the Bible. If we ignore this instruction book and try to do things our own way, we soon make mistakes — things go wrong — we are not living to the full potential that God intended. In the Bible we learn of God's Son, the Lord Jesus, who came to this world to give His life for His people so that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly (John 10:10).