

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church / March 28, 2021 / Pastor Jeff Harrison
Encountering the Life Changing Jesus

My Hidden Agenda for Jesus (Judas' Story) (John 12-13 and Matthew 26-27)

A story shows our temptation to have agendas for God

Good morning, how ya'll doing this morning? God's Word has been challenging me this week, so let's pray as we start... (Alexanders loss of Randy's dad)

Back in my 20s, I injured my back, herniating a disc, and early on it was so painful any time I would move at all. Each morning was a particular struggle, just trying to get out of the memory foam bed I had sunk into during the night, looking in that process like a beached whale.

It would have been funny if every movement wasn't excruciatingly painful. After a couple of weeks of really struggling with my back 24/7, one morning, during my awkward attempt to get out of bed, I fell to the floor. After struggling to get up for 20 long minutes, I cried out to God, asking Him to help me to get up and remove this pain.

My prayer was not immediately answered as I wanted, and as I continued my pain-filled struggle just to stand up, I became angry at God. Eventually I managed to get to my feet, but the sharp pain was ever present, and I stayed angry at God all day.

My pain and struggle had surfaced an agenda hidden in my heart. That I was happy to follow God if things were going at least decently, but not so much if He allowed me to keep experiencing this. I had an agenda: that in my 20's God shouldn't allow me to experience all day debilitating pain for so long, unsure of when it would end.

As you can imagine, things were not going to go well for me, those around me, or my relationship with God as long I demanded that He cooperate with my agenda for Him.

That was my agenda for God back then. Perhaps we got agendas for God today, something that God better cooperate with, perhaps related to our health and safety, or getting married one day, or our career and finances, something that we feel God must provide us.

Orienting to God's Word: Judas' background and hidden agenda

This morning we're looking at a man who had an agenda for God, Judas Iscariot, to learn from his tragic mistakes. So if you've got a Bible or Bible app, open to the gospel of John, chapter 12. John 12. If not, no worries, we'll have the verses on the screen. If you're new to

reading the Bible, the big numbers are chapter numbers, and the little numbers are verse numbers.

Judas Iscariot lived about 2,000 years ago, and along with the whole Jewish nation, endured **hard times** as the Romans occupied them. We know little of Judas before Jesus called him. Iscariot perhaps refers to Judas being from the town of Kerioth, south of Jerusalem. Judas shared his name with Judas Maccabeus, a man who freed the Jewish people about 150 years earlier. So once called by Jesus, perhaps Judas wondered if he had a similar destiny to Judas Maccabeus, that he might help overthrow foreign rule too.

Luke's gospel tells us that Judas' call came after Jesus spent a night seeking God in prayer before finalizing His 12 main disciples. As Judas lived with Jesus and the other 11 disciples for the next couple of years, the 11 perceive Judas to be one of them.

Judas, like the rest, was learning from Jesus and being sent out to evangelize, heal, and cast out demons. Judas was also trusted as the treasurer for the whole group, keeping their money bag. There's never any sense in the gospels of the 11 suspecting Judas, even with Jesus occasionally warning them that there's a traitor.

But it eventually it becomes clear that Judas had an agenda for Jesus that stayed hidden from the 11 until Judas' betrayal. Broadly speaking, it appears Judas's agenda was that Jesus had to overthrow their Roman oppressors and then put Judas in a position of power and wealth in Jesus' kingdom.

Teaching: Judas' agenda for Jesus

Judas objects as Mary is sold out to Jesus (John 12) – As long as Judas thought his agenda for Jesus would be fulfilled, Judas followed. But around the last week of Jesus' life, Judas doubted, which we see starting in John chapter 12, verse 1. **(1-3a)**

12 Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ² Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. ³ Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume;

Lazarus, Mary, and Martha are a brother and sisters in close relationship with Jesus. They love Jesus, and want to honor Him.

Back then they couldn't just turn a handle and take a shower whenever they wanted. And they didn't have deodorant or A/C, and it was a hot climate, so imagine **just how stinky** everyone was most of the time, **just nasty BO**, so Mary gets out the perfume.

Mary's pint of pure nard was very likely her most valuable possession **by far**, her life savings, meant to make sure she didn't starve if they hit hard times, as often occurred.

When you had an honored guest like Jesus, you'd bring out this super valuable perfume and give them a tiny bit, to honor and to help with the smell situation. But Mary didn't just put on a tiny bit, as we see in the middle of verse 3. It says: **(3b)**

she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

Mary had heard Jesus teach about His coming death. Unlike the male disciples, Mary seems to already understand that Jesus is about to give up His life for her. In response to **Jesus' amazing love**, Mary gives radically in worship.

Mary takes her most valuable possession and pours it **all out in appreciation for how Jesus is about to pour out His precious blood for Mary**. And who just can't stand to see Mary giving her best to Jesus, with no hidden agenda behind it? Verse 4. **(4-6)**

⁴ But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, ⁵ "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." ⁶ He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

So who doesn't want to see, while greedily focused on gain, that this is a season for Jesus and His followers to be ready to give their best up, as Mary just did? Judas.

Judas hides his objection and agenda here in spiritual language, falsely acting like his concern is good stewardship and helping the poor. Some today justify not being part of Jesus' church by saying things like "I'd be part of the church and give if the church was less hypocritical and gave more to the poor."

In Judas' case, the reality is that he has a visceral response to Mary giving generously to Jesus with no hidden agenda. **Mary stands in stark contrast to Judas' agenda** that includes personal greed, as Judas is displeased to be unable to steal some of the proceeds like he would have if the perfume had been sold.

Judas has been serving his own agenda along the way, as verse 6 says, repeatedly stealing from the funds meant to help the poor and help people to know Jesus. Having established this selfish pattern, and now seeming to lose hope that Jesus would fulfill his agenda, **Judas is ready to sell Jesus out.**

Matthew's gospel makes the connection between the anointing and Judas' betrayal clear. In Matthew 26, **the very next** verse after the story of anointing Jesus with perfume is Judas going to the chief priests and asking, "What are you willing to give me if I deliver Jesus over to you?"

One of my seminary professors said he was once preaching on Judas selling Jesus for 30 pieces of silver, and afterwards, a man in the congregation came up and said, "The difference between Judas and me **is that at least Judas got paid.**"

Like Judas, and that honest man, we all can face the temptation to forsake Jesus when it costs too much or Jesus doesn't meet enough of our agenda for Him. At the core of this dynamic is the question, "is my relationship with Jesus about me following Jesus so that Jesus serves my agenda, or is it just about me serving Jesus?"

Despite gracious warnings, Judas hides his intentions to betray (John 13) – Despite what Judas is up to, Jesus still keeps pursuing Judas. We see this in chapter 13 of John. There Jesus tries to soften Judas' heart by washing his feet.

Back then everyone wore sandals, and the streets were dusty and dirty and animals were pooping, and there was no trash truck or indoor plumbing, so people's feet would get nasty. Washing people's feet was a job only a lowly servant would do.

Yet **Lord Jesus, in love, serves Judas by washing his stanky feet, even with Judas about to hand Jesus over to the authorities.** Jesus here is trying to soften Judas' heart, but Judas still keeps his evil agenda hidden away. So Jesus tries reaching Judas in another way in verse 21 of John 13. Verse 21: **(21-22)**

²¹ After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, "Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray me." ²² His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant.

In these verses Jesus subtly calls Judas out, without making it obvious to the other disciples. Jesus lets Judas know that He knows what Judas is up to.

Jesus is seeking to convict and warn Judas and invite Judas to bring his hidden agenda out in the light and seek Jesus' help. In Matthew and Mark's gospels, Jesus warns that if Judas follows through with his betrayal, *it would be better if Judas hadn't been born*. With the stakes unimaginably high, Judas *still keeps his struggle and agenda hidden*, continuing in verse 23. **(23-26)**

²³ One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him. ²⁴ Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, "Ask him which one he means." ²⁵ Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, "Lord, who is it?" ²⁶ Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot.

Notice that Judas is seated near Jesus, in a place of honor at the table, close enough to receive the bread handed to him. But even as Jesus continues to honor Judas, Judas decides about Jesus, *"No matter how much You love me and serve me, no matter how much You impact others through me, no matter how much You offer to bless me spiritually, if you won't cooperate with my agenda Jesus, if you won't overthrow our Roman oppressors and give me a position of political and financial power, then we're done, I'm selling you out."* Having been opening his heart to evil, Satan enters Judas in verse 27. **(27-30)**

²⁷ As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. So Jesus told him, "What you are about to do, do quickly." ²⁸ But no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him. ²⁹ Since Judas had charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the festival, or to give something to the poor. ³⁰ As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night.

Satan's influence on Judas may not have been demonic possession as we see in other places in Scripture, since the other disciples seem oblivious that Judas is the traitor, being influenced by Satan. But things are dark inside Judas, as it is now dark outside in verse 30.

After concluding the meal, Jesus takes the remaining 11 disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane, outside the city's walls. Let's open now to the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 26, where we'll continue the story. In Matthew 26, Jesus takes Peter, James, and John to a spot in the garden to pray. As Jesus agonizes in prayer over His coming crucifixion and death, Peter, James, and John fall asleep, unable to keep awake and pray with Jesus.

His agenda unfulfilled, Judas betrays Jesus (Matthew 26) – As Jesus hears the approaching mob, He wakes up Peter, James, and John as Judas arrives. Matthew chapter 26, starting in verse 45. **(45-50)**

⁴⁵ Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. ⁴⁶ Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!” ⁴⁷ While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people. ⁴⁸ Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: “The one I kiss is the man; arrest him.” ⁴⁹ Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, “Greetings, Rabbi!” and kissed him. ⁵⁰ Jesus replied, “Do what you came for, friend.” Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him.

So Judas comes with a big armed mob, and ironically greets Jesus as his rabbi, which means “master”. **Then Judas cruelly betrays Jesus with a kiss.** We don’t know everything going on inside of Judas, but the pressure had been mounting for all of Jesus’ disciples.

The Jewish religious leaders viewed Jesus as a threat that needed to be removed. As the disciples traveled to Jerusalem for this Passover, Jesus was talking on the way about how He would suffer. Then Jesus made a grand entrance into Jerusalem, purposefully riding into the city as a king, with a crowd hailing Him today, the Sunday before Easter.

Then Jesus called out the corrupt practices at the temple as He cleared it and kept calling out the Jewish religious leaders’ hypocrisy. As Jesus increased the tension with these actions, He didn’t follow that up with forming an army of supporters for a revolution. He instead just continued teaching about God.

The disciples all knew that the religious leaders were looking to arrest and kill Jesus, and that they would likely **at least** be arrested if they kept following Jesus. So at the Last Supper, as Jesus says, “One of you will betray me” the disciples don’t say, “Well Judas is obviously the only one of us who would even consider betraying you Jesus.” No, in the danger, they wonder who might be the one to actually betray Jesus, it seems like some realized that they might be tempted to no longer follow.

We all face this temptation to follow Jesus conditionally, keeping with Him only as long as it doesn’t cost us too much and He’s meeting enough of our agenda. If we live this way, then ultimately, we’re trying to be the master, **and make Jesus our servant for our agenda.**

Judas had concluded that Jesus wasn't going to follow Judas' agenda of revolution, power, and wealth. So Judas, with Satan's influence, betrays.

Maybe Judas was bitter about Jesus not providing what he longed for; I've been there. Maybe in his greed Judas wanted to profit from this breakup, and maybe he was trying to save his own skin by helping the other side. Some, giving Judas more benefit of the doubt, wonder if Judas hoped his betrayal would force Jesus to use His power to defend Himself, and kick off the revolution Judas wanted. Whatever all of Judas' motives were, it's clear that Judas' betrayal with a kiss, **is the total opposite of the love Jesus had been showing Judas.**

Judas regrets pursuing his agenda (Matthew 27) –And Judas is soon filled with regret over how he has pursued his own agenda, and its consequences, which we see in Matthew chapter 27. So open to Matthew 27. I'll start reading in verse 1. **(1-4)**

27 Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people made their plans how to have Jesus executed. ² So they bound him, led him away and handed him over to Pilate the governor. ³ When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. ⁴ “I have sinned,” he said, “for I have betrayed innocent blood.” “What is that to us?” they replied. “That’s your responsibility.”

In the end, putting his own agenda first wasn't what Judas thought it would be. Rather than satisfied, Judas is seized with remorse over betraying Jesus.

So Judas tries to give the money back and confess his sin, and the religious leaders coldly reply, “That’s your responsibility.” Judas felt the heavy weight of that responsibility, of betraying the Son of God, as we see in verse 5.

⁵ So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself.

Imagine Judas, as he still has the silver in his hand, realizing he has chosen these 30 coins **over Jesus**, as he then gives them away and goes and hangs himself.

Next Step

Things are dark here in the story, a tragic end for Judas, and a warning for us. Maybe there's something keeping you from starting a relationship with Jesus, like say you want to keep

sleeping with your non-Christian boyfriend or girlfriend. Whatever it is that you think is so important right now that it's keeping you from coming to Jesus because you don't want Jesus interfering with it, I hope you realize before it's too late **what kind of trade you're making**.

I don't want you, like Judas, to one day be seized with remorse about what you've chosen over Jesus, thinking "what did I do?" Before your agenda destroys your life, before you step into eternity, come to Jesus in faith, trusting that Jesus died for your sins and rose from the dead, to give you the free gift of eternal life and give you His Spirit to help you to follow His agenda of love.

If you do know Jesus, Judas's story challenges us to consider if we have any agendas for Jesus that hold a higher place in our lives than following Jesus. Agendas like demanding not to already face, in your 20's, long term debilitating back pain. Agendas like, "I'm following you Jesus, but in return you better make sure my kids stay safe and turn out okay."

Agendas so important to us that if Jesus doesn't cooperate with what we want, we might walk away. Agendas that show that our relationship with Jesus **might be more about us using Jesus, serving to convince Him to give us what we really want**.

Let's learn from Judas' story, starting with no longer hiding our agendas from Jesus and His people as we confess them. We can apply Judas' story to our lives, by confessing any agendas we have for Jesus.

As a first step in that application, here's a prayer of confession. Let's all stand now. You don't have to recite this prayer. But if you're ready to take the next step of confessing any agendas you have for Jesus, **if you're sorry for that** and want Jesus' forgiveness and help, then I invite you to pray this out loud with me:

Most merciful God,
We confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done,
and by what we have left undone.
We have not loved you with our whole heart;
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.
We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.

For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
have mercy on us and forgive us;
that we may delight in your will,
and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your Name. Amen.

Things are dark at this point, with Judas dead and Jesus arrested. So be sure and come back next Sunday, and invite a friend, to hear the story's conclusion, what Mary glimpsed ahead of time as poured out her costly perfume.

Next Sunday discover the cross and the empty tomb, and hear the mystery of resurrection and new life for sinners with their own agendas through faith in Jesus.

As we see Jesus, pouring out His precious blood, like Mary, may we worship, devoted to the One Who showed such devotion to us. Amen?

Dismissal – You're dismissed, go in peace to love and serve the Lord, but first, love someone in this room.