



Central Peninsula Church

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The Gospel of Lost Judas

SERIES: *A Savior for All People*

An article in a recent issue of *National Geographic* begins, “He is one of the most reviled men in history. But was Judas only obeying his master’s wishes when he betrayed Jesus with a kiss? That’s what a newly revealed ancient Christian text says. After being lost for nearly 1,700 years, the Gospel of Judas was recently restored, authenticated, and translated. Some biblical scholars are calling the Gospel of Judas “the most significant archaeological discovery in 60 years.”

But what does this gospel really say? It begins by saying that it’s the secret account of an agreed upon plan between Jesus and Judas made three days before he celebrated Passover. It goes on to describe Judas as Jesus’ closest friend, someone who understood Christ’s true message and was singled out for special status among his disciples. In the key passage Jesus tells Judas it’s necessary for someone to free him finally from his human body, and he prefers that this liberation be done by a friend rather than by an enemy. So he asks his friend Judas to sell him out, to betray him. It’s treason to the general public, but between Jesus and Judas it was part of the plan.

That’s what the gospel of Judas says. By the way, it also speaks of the heavenly kingdom of Barbelo, the 72 heavens, the 360 firmaments, and a confusing array of demigods who inhabit them. Even most liberal scholars admit up front that it “tells us nothing about the historical Jesus and nothing about the historical Judas.” So, instead of the gospel of Judas, let’s stick with the gospel of Luke. Remember, Luke said at the very start that his gospel was based on eyewitness accounts and was written only after careful investigation (Lk.1:1-4). When we get to the final days of Jesus’ life on earth, Luke describes a different kind of plan. Actually, it describes two plans: Judas had a plan and God had a plan. Judas had a plan for destruction. God had a plan for salvation. And the way Luke tells it, each of us are invited to examine our own hearts as to which plan we’re a part of.

I. Judas was planning destruction vv.1-6

Judas’s destructive plan begins in vv.1-6. **“Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which is called the Passover, was approaching. The chief priests and the scribes were seeking how they might put Him to death; for they were afraid of the people. And Satan entered into Judas who was called Iscariot, belonging to the number of the twelve. And he went away and**

discussed with the chief priests and officers how he might betray Him to them. They were glad and agreed to give him money. So he consented, and began seeking a good opportunity to betray Him to them apart from the crowd.” The point of this plan is to destroy Jesus. There are a number of players in this plan. First of all, there are the people. Notice this plan took place as the Jewish celebration of the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread approached. These were important celebrations for the Jews and Jerusalem would have swelled with people to celebrate the most important events in Israel’s history—how God freed them from slavery in Egypt. But all these people posed a problem for a second group, the chief priests and scribes. They wanted to get rid of Jesus. They knew that many of these people were enthralled with Jesus and if they weren’t careful they could incite a rebellion.

So they had to be so glad when this disciple of Jesus, one from his inner circle, approached them. Judas is the third player in this plan. His part in the plan is betrayal. We don’t know exactly what his motives were; it might have been money, it might have been disappointment or jealousy. But when he showed up at their doorstep the religious leaders knew they had hit the jackpot. Judas would allow them to find Jesus away from the crowds so they could take him in private. And if trouble arose and their plan went wrong, they could make the case that one of Jesus’ own was the cause of his downfall. Judas could be the scapegoat.

So you might say Judas was being used, but not just by the chief priests and scribes. Verse 3 introduces a third player in this plan of destruction, perhaps the most important one of all. Behind it all loomed an invisible and sinister power. We haven’t seen much of Satan since chapter 4 when Jesus encountered him in a head to head battle out in the wilderness before he started his public ministry. There, Luke wrote that when Satan finished tempting Jesus, he **“left him for an opportune time”** (4:13). That time had now come. Luke says **“Satan entered into Judas,”** which doesn’t necessarily mean possession but it does mean influence. Somewhere along the line, Judas had opened the door and bought the lie, and Satan was more than willing to take over.

We wonder, why would Satan do this? What’s he up to? He wants to get rid of Jesus. He knows Jesus has come to save that which was lost. What he didn’t understand, as we’ll see in a minute, is that he himself

was being used. But we see here that he'll do whatever he can to stop God's saving purposes. And he uses people. Sometimes it's obvious who is on his side. Although Luke doesn't tell us that Satan was behind the hardheartedness and hatred of the religious leaders, it's obvious that he was. That's a no brainer. Paul says Satan **"has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ..."** (2 Cor. 4:4). We know people like that, but sometimes it's not so obvious who is on his side. Look at Judas. As Luke says here, he **"belonged to the number of the Twelve."** Remember that Judas had been chosen by Jesus as one of the Twelve after a night of prayer. He had been sent out with the others and preached and healed and cast out demons in Jesus' name, just as the others did. Sometimes it's not so obvious who Satan is using. We're far too naïve about the reality of Satan's work, not just outside community of faith but within it. Why are we so surprised when someone defects? "How could he do that? How could he turn his back on the Lord? We led a Bible study together. We led someone to the Lord together." Well, have you read your Bible? Paul, when he addressed a group even as mature as the elders in Ephesus said in Acts 20:29-30, **"I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them."** So don't be surprised when we see this plan of destruction impacting those within the community of faith.

II. God was planning salvation vv.7-23

But there was another plan at work as well. While Satan was planning destruction, Jesus was planning salvation.

A. Preparations for the Passover meal: We see the plan begin to unfold in vv. 7-13.

"Then came the first day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. And Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, 'Go and prepare the Passover for us, so that we may eat it.' They said to Him, 'Where do You want us to prepare it?' And He said to them, 'When you have entered the city, a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him into the house that he enters. And you shall say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher says to you, 'Where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?'' And he will show you a large, furnished upper room; prepare it there.' And they left and found everything just as He had told them; and they prepared the Passover."

Luke tells us that the day came when the Passover lamb was to be sacrificed. The actual meal wouldn't be eaten until after sundown, but the day was filled with careful preparations. So Jesus sent Peter and John into the city to do this important work. Clearly one of the concerns that Jesus had was to maintain secrecy. He knew what Judas was up to and he didn't want him to know where the meal would be eaten. So Jesus said to Peter and John that they would certainly notice a man carrying pitcher of water because normally women carried the water. And when they followed him into an unspecified house and mentioned to him that the Teacher wants to know where the guest room is where he could eat the Passover meal with his disciples, he would show them a large, furnished upper room. So they went and they found it just as he said. It's like everything had been prepared for them. It's like nothing takes Jesus by surprise. He's completely in control. Even though the forces of evil are plotting, a counter-plot is being carried out; a divine plan for salvation is unfolding.

A little boy was turning the pages of a book on religious art. He came to a gruesome painting of the crucifixion. He stared at it a long time and he got a very sad look on his face. Then he said to his mother, "If God had been there, he wouldn't have let them do that." But he was there. And as the wheels began to turn towards that event, which would take place the very next day, we see that God was in control. He was working out his plan.

I wonder if we can see that in our own lives as well? When it seems that everything is out of control, dare we believe that God is still in control? In the darkest hour of his life, Jesus knew his Father was in control. That should sustain us in the darkest hours of our life.

I was watching on PBS's *Frontline* this past week the whole history of the AIDS epidemic. It's an amazing story that deals with politics, science, culture, morality and religion. Millions of people have died and are still dying. Billions of dollars have been spent on prevention and research. Still there is no real cure. It seems so out of control. I even had a young man in my youth group years ago who died of AIDS ten years after a blood transfusion that he had when he was 17. It seems so out of control and so random. But God is still in control.

Even in the midst of betrayal, he's still working out his plan. Have you ever been betrayed? Perhaps by an employer, or a friend, or a child, or a husband or a wife? You feel so helpless, so out of control. How do you live with that? How do you go on without letting bitterness and resentment and fear eat away at your own heart and infect every relationship you have? Thomas á Kempis wrote, "Christ was despised on earth by men, and in his greatest need, amidst insults, was abandoned by those who knew him and by friends; and you dare to complain of anyone? Christ had his adversaries and slanderers; and you wish to have everyone as friends and benefactors? How will your patience win its crown if it has encountered nothing of

adversity?" You have to believe that even in the midst of the betrayal, God will have his way.

B. Eating the Passover meal: That evening Jesus and his disciples were there in the upper room to eat the Passover. Starting in v.14 we have Luke's account of the Last Supper. Luke says, "**When the hour had come, He reclined at the table, and the apostles with Him. And He said to them, 'I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I shall never again eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God'**" (vv. 14–16). You can see how important this meal was to Jesus. Don't miss the human element here. When he says, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you," he uses the strongest possible language. Imagine knowing that you had less than 24 hours to live. How would you want to spend those hours? I know how I would want to spend them. I would gather together the people I loved the most and tell them what they meant to me and what my hopes and dreams were for them. And what better way to do it than at a special meal. That's what Jesus did.

1. A future meal: As you probably know there was a whole ritual that went on when the Jews celebrated the Passover meal and that explains much of what Jesus will go on and do here. But there is more. Jesus will use this meal to disclose more of what his plan of salvation is all about. We reenact that every time we take communion. One of the things he says right here is that the Passover will have a fulfillment. Jesus says he won't eat of it again until it "finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God." His heart now travels beyond pain, sorrow and death to the reunion he would have with them in heaven—the wedding supper of the lamb. What was the Passover but a celebration of how God had delivered his people from slavery? And that's why the feast in heaven fulfills the Passover because what we'll be celebrating is how Jesus delivered us from a much worse slavery to sin and death. So whenever we celebrate communion we do so with an eye to the future.

2. A communal meal: Then Luke goes on and reveals more about this plan. "**And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He said, 'Take this and share it among yourselves; for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine from now on until the kingdom of God comes'**" (vv. 17–18). Luke is the only one who mentions an additional cup before the traditional bread and cup we normally associate with the Lord's Supper. There were normally four different passing of the cups in a Passover meal. Most believe this was the first cup of the meal, which took place right before the opening prayers. Normally, though, they drank from their own cups at this point. But Jesus distributes a single cup. I believe he does this to symbolize the unity of those who share in this table of communion; a unity that will again be experienced when we drink together in the kingdom of God. This is why Paul got so upset with the Corinthian church when they

celebrated communion. They did it around a meal they called a love feast and yet there were factions among them and some of the wealthier members of the church were eating and not sharing with those in need. Paul said it would be better for them just to go home and meet. There is a family aspect to this meal we can't ignore.

3. A commemorative meal: Next come the words that we normally associate with the Lord's Supper. "**And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.'** And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, '**This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood'**" (vv. 19–20). Jesus tells us how this plan of salvation would take place. His body will be given for them. His blood will be poured out for them. Remember how the Jews were saved at the first Passover? A lamb was slain and the blood was wiped across their door post. Then the angel of death, who had come to kill all the firstborn of the land, would "pass over" their house and they would be spared. Jesus reinterprets the old Passover and now says the bread represents his body and the wine represents his blood. And that blood seals a new covenant. Covenants were always sealed in blood. In the Old Covenant the blood of animals was poured out year after year to secure forgiveness for the people, but in the New Covenant only one sacrifice was required—that of the spotless lamb of God. He would set his people free, not from Egypt but from sin and death. That's what Satan didn't understand. Like a chess match, he thought he had Jesus in check, but he didn't realize that the death of Jesus would mean checkmate for him. And that's what we remind ourselves of when we come to this table.

C. Starting the Passover meal: But one of things that is easy to forget at this point is who was there at that table with Jesus. Look what he says. "**But behold, the hand of the one betraying Me is with Mine on the table. For indeed, the Son of Man is going as it has been determined; but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!** And they began to discuss among themselves which one of them it might be who was going to do this thing" (vv. 21–23).

Jesus says several things here. First he says the hand of the betrayer was with him at the table. Then he says that the betrayer is simply fulfilling what was part of God's plan. "**The Son of Man is going as it has been determined.**" This is one of the great mysteries of the way God works. Even the worst sin of betrayal cannot thwart the plan of God, and not only that, God actually uses it. He uses evil to accomplish his purposes. Remember what Joseph said to his brothers after they betrayed him? "**You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good**" (Gen.50:20). And yet we

also see here that just because God uses it doesn't mean that it's excused. That's why Jesus says in the next breath, **"Woe to that man by whom he is betrayed."** That man is headed for the worst fate of all. Finally, Luke says that the disciples started to discuss among themselves which one of them would do such a thing. No doubt Judas was right in there with them: "Who could it be?"

Isn't this amazing? This is the most intimate of settings. Jesus has been pouring his heart out to his closest friends. Imagine doing that, all the while knowing that Judas had already sold him out. And he was right there at the table. It's interesting that the other gospel writers tell us that Jesus made this announcement about the betrayer before he passed out the bread and the wine. John tells us that Judas left earlier in the meal. Why doesn't Luke mention this? Luke wants to stress the irony and the depth of betrayal of having Judas there while Jesus poured out his heart and ultimately his life for them. In the midst of the gravest human treachery he gave the gift of himself. It's hard for us to imagine Judas doing that, but Luke wants us to know that sometimes betrayal comes from within the ranks of the Christian community.

We think, how could someone do this? But when you really think about it, the same thing takes place every Sunday in churches across the land, including our church. Someone comes to church, and maybe they like how the songs make them feel and everybody seems so nice, but there is no real repentance; there is no real submission to the lordship of Christ. How many people come to church and take communion and have every intention of going back out into the world and committing the same sin they came in with? There is absolutely no sense that there is a deep need not only to confess of our sin but to repent of it. Fred Craddock says, "The church is at its best when it stops asking, 'Why did Judas do it?' and instead examines its own record of discipleship."

I think we need to take the table of the Lord more seriously. That's why Paul says to the Corinthians that they should examine themselves before they take the Lord's Supper. He says that with this story about Judas in mind. We need to examine our own hearts. Are we really true followers of Jesus? Do we really take up our cross daily and follow him? Have we really trusted in him as our only Savior and Lord? Does our life show the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self control? Are we just playing games? If you're here this morning and you're

struggling with some sin and you know it's wrong and you want it out of your life and you've confessed it to the Lord and asked for his strength to overcome it, then this table is set for you. The disciples were sinners, too. Starting in v.24 they're haggling over which one of them is the greatest. In a few hours Peter would deny him three times. We're not talking about being sinless. But if you're here and you have no intention of surrendering your life to Jesus, it's best not to partake. We're glad you're here and we hope so much that the Lord will get a hold of you, but we don't make a mockery out of this table.

CONCLUSION

The movie *Braveheart* tells the story of Scottish patriot William Wallace and his quest to liberate his country from British rule. Robert the Bruce, the most powerful of the Scottish noblemen, is faced with a hard decision because of Wallace's rebellion. On the one hand, he wants a free Scotland; on the other hand, he wants personal power and wealth. Robert the Bruce's father was an aging leper who wanted power for his son above all else, even if it means betraying Wallace and his freedom fighters. He convinces Robert to betray Wallace in a major battle with the English, so that he'll become the puppet-king of Scotland.

In one scene, Robert the Bruce comes to terms with his betrayal and realizes what matters most in life. He's been transformed by Wallace's example. His father says, "Son, we must have alliance with England to prevail here. You achieved that, you saved your family, you increased your land. In time you will have all the power in Scotland."

Robert the Bruce says, "Lands, titles, men, power—nothing."

His father says, "Nothing?"

Robert says, "I have nothing. Men fight for me because if they do not I throw them off my land, and I starve their wives and their children. Those men who bled the ground red at Ful Kirk, they fought for William Wallace, and he fights for something that I've never had, and I took it from him when I betrayed him, and I saw it in his face on the battlefield, and it's tearing me apart!"

Robert's father says, "All men betray. All lose heart."

Robert the Bruce says, "I don't want to lose heart! I want to believe, as he does...I will never be on the wrong side again."

As we come to the communion table, instead of looking around and saying who could do such a thing as to betray Jesus, let us examine our own hearts, and let us pray, "I don't want to lose heart. I want to believe...I will never be on the wrong side again."

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