

What Might Have Been

A number of years ago the poet John Greenleaf Whittier wrote a poem about a brilliant judge that fell in love with a simple country girl. He wanted to marry her but instead he married someone else; someone that could give him immediate wealth and prestige and power. It was an unhappy relationship from the beginning and his life was miserable. As Whittier brings that poem to a close, he ends with these words ***“For with all the sad words on tongue and pen the saddest are these, ‘it might have been.’”*** The pages of history are littered with stories of the lives of people who could have been so much more than they were. Maybe they failed to take advantage of the opportunities that came their way or maybe they just didn’t excel to reach their full potential. But the epitaph of their life is simply, “It could have been.”

Unfortunately, that’s the story of many of God’s people. They have so much potential in the kingdom of God to shine as a light in the darkness. But for some reason they don’t reach that full potential and it is said of them *“Oh, what might have been.”* We see this in the life of Judas. We are all familiar with the sad story of Judas. Here was a man with such great potential and enjoyed such marvelous promises. The privileges that he had in walking with Jesus and yet his life came to a miserable end.

We don’t know a lot of detail about his life. His father was named Simon (John 6:71) and many think that he was from a little village in the south part of Judea named Kerioth and thus was the only one that the Lord selected that was not a Galilean. We know that he heard Jesus’ teachings and saw the miracles performed just as did the other apostles. He even endured the hardships of the others. Yet for some reason, all of that never seemed to take root in his life.

Now there is no reason to suspect that he was not sincere in motive when he became a disciple and the others didn’t have any suspicions regarding his love and loyalty toward Jesus. In fact, they had so much confidence in Judas that they elected him to be the treasurer of the group. They had a little money bag and when they came across some money, they would put it into the bag to be used as needed. Judas had the responsibility of caring for and distributing this money. In some respects, this is amazing because there may have been another apostle more qualified for this task. Matthew was a tax collector and would have been very familiar with accounting and the principles of bookkeeping, but Judas was the one selected for the task.

So here we have Judas one of the twelve with such promise and yet somewhere along the way things began to change. Both Luke and John tell us that the point came where Satan entered into Judas and he betrayed the Lord. ***Then entered Satan into Judas surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve. (Luke 22:3)*** No one would have suspected this. Judas went to the Chief priest and bargained with them for Jesus and as a result, he promised to betray Jesus into their hands for thirty pieces of silver, the price of a common slave. No doubt the chief priest was glad to see Judas come because they recognized that he was close to Jesus and would know where he would be when he was away from the multitudes and apart from the crowd. At this time Jesus was highly respected by the people that it would have been dangerous to try arrest him while he was in the presence of the multitude that he taught and performed his miracles. So, whatever they were to do needed to be done quietly and secretly, and Judas was the one that could give them that information.

So, when Judas had made his bargain with the chief priest, he went back to the disciples as they met in the upper room. Judas was with them as they ate that final Passover meal together and as the Lord got up and washed their feet to teach them a lesson on serving. Judas sat there as Jesus announced that one of them would betray them and said that it would have been better for that man if he had never been born. After all

that, Judas got up and left the group as he returned to the chief priest who gathered a band of soldiers. Judas then led them to the garden called Gethsemane. It was there that he approached Jesus and greeted him with a kiss. There was nothing unusual about that as that was the common form of greeting in the Middle East at that time as it still is today. But this particular kiss was a “kiss of death” because by it he pointed out Jesus in the darkness of the night. It was Judas that betrayed Jesus.

When Judas realized that he had made a mistake, he returned to the chief priest and tried to return the money, but they wouldn't accept it. ***Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, (3) Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that. (Matthew 27:3-4)*** Their attitude was it's not our concern, you made the bargain now you have to live with the consequences. When Judas realized the gravity of what he had done, he went out and hanged himself.

What was it that caused Judas to come to that point of failure in his life? What is it that causes us at time to fail in our services to the Lord and to betray him? The things that caused Judas to fail are often the things that cause us to fail as well; those things that keep us from living up to our potential.

NO. 1. JUDAS FAILED BECAUSE OF THE SPIRIT OF COVETOUSNESS. Judas had a passion and love for money. John 12:6 says Judas was a thief. It seems that he was use to pilfering out of the money bag. The word used for “thief” is not the word describing the man that puts on a mask and robs a convenient store at gunpoint. The word here describes a person that sneaks around and steals from someone secretly. Apparently, Judas loved his money more than he loved his master. This is evident from the episode that took place in John 12. There Jesus and his disciples had been invited into the home of Lazarus and as they were eating together, Mary came in with a very expensive ointment as it was worth approximately a year's wage. She took that ointment and anointed the feet of Jesus and then she wiped his feet with her hair. It was a beautiful gesture of love and appreciation.

When Judas saw that, he began to complain. ***John 12:4-6 Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him, (5) Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? (6) This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein.*** Mark's account of this event records Judas saying ... ***Why was this waste of the ointment made? (Mark 14:4)*** Notice Judas said that money could have been given to the poor, but Jesus tells us in John 12:6 not to be deceived by Judas concern for the poor. He really didn't care for the poor but rather wanted the money to be put in the money bag for him to steal.

It was this spirit of covetousness that eventually led Judas to do what he did. Apparently one day he heard there was a price on the head of Jesus, and in his greed and love of money ole Judas betrayed his master. He bargained with the chief priest and finally settled on thirty pieces of silver.

Now there are a lot of people today that betray the Lord because of their love for material things. We are warned that such can be a snare. Frequently the scriptures warn us of the danger of the things of this world. They were made by God to be a blessing but for some people what was intended to be a blessing has become a curse and has become our master. Jesus warned in ***Matthew 6:24 No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.*** For some, money has become their God. That's why Paul writes in Col 3:5 that covetousness as idolatry. It can rule your life. ***1 Timothy 6:10 For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with***

many sorrows. Judas had the wrong set of values, and that same problem has wrecked many Christian lives today.

NO. 2. JUDAS HAD A HARDEN AND CALLUS HEART toward the words of the Lord. Even after Judas had made that bargain with the chief priest, it still wasn't too late. He didn't have to follow thru. He still could have changed his mind. Everything in that upper room that night could have been geared in the direction of Judas. The Lord took that opportunity to give Judas one final opportunity to reconsider his course. When Judas returns to that upper room, Jesus treats him with total kindness; he treats him just like the other disciples as he washes his feet just as tenderly as he does their feet. During the course of the night Jesus reveals that one of them would betray him. He says it's the one to whom I will dip the sop (John 13:26). Apparently, that was done so that only Judas and Jesus knew what was happening and what Judas was going to do later that night. Then Jesus issued that warning. ***Mark 14:21 The Son of man indeed goeth, as it is written of him: but woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! good were it for that man if he had never been born.*** Jesus repeatedly gave Judas opportunities to change his mind, but it didn't seem to soak in; it didn't seem to matter. His heart was so hardened against the word of Jesus that he was determined to pursue that course of betrayal.

As you consider that episode in the upper room, two things about Jesus become very apparent.

First, Jesus knows us. He knew Judas and his inward motives. He was aware of the treachery that was in Judas' heart. The Lord knows us also. Our hearts are an open book before Jesus. While you may be able to conceal your attitudes and actions from others, you can't conceal them from the Lord.

Secondly, not only does Jesus know you, he also loves you. The amazing thing about this event is in spite of Jesus knowing what Judas was about to do, he continued to love and appeal to him, and what happened in that upper room was love's last appeal. Now the Lord is aware of our failures, sins and weaknesses; but he loves us anyway. However, it is evident that Jesus will not force a person to make the right choice. Ultimately, we make the choice of right/wrong for ourselves and in what direction our lives will go. Now Jesus certainly had the power to stop Judas from making that betrayal that night. He could have stopped him by informing the others of Judas' plans and they would have surely stopped him. After all the "sons of thunder" were there. Volatile Peter was there. Jesus could have called on those legions of angels to deal with Judas. But he didn't because it was a choice that Judas had to make. So, understand that today, the Lord is not going to force you to serve him or do what's right. That will be a choice that you and you alone will have to make. If we fail it will be because of the Lord rather it will be in spite of the Lord.

Judas had become so callus that he wouldn't listen to the appeals of the Lord and some people are like that today. They know what the scriptures teach and what the Lord expects yet they fail to follow through. Their attitude is that "one day I will change" but most often that day never comes.

NO. 3. JUDAS FAILED BECAUSE OF HOPELESSNESS. There was hopelessness because of the sin of despair. He didn't fully appreciate the love and forgiveness of the Lord. There has been a lot of discussion as to why Judas did what he did. Certainly, coveting money was one reason. Some think that maybe he was trying to force the hand of Jesus to establish a military kingdom and throw off the forces of Rome. Things were not progressing as quickly as he wanted so he put Jesus into a position where he had to make a choice. Be it true or not, somewhere along the line, Judas realized what a mistake he had made. Apparently, he did not understand what was going to happen to Jesus and that the enemies of Jesus would take that betrayal as far

as they did. So, when he saw that Jesus was going to be wrongfully condemned and was going to die, he went to the chief priest and tried to undo the deal. He tried to give the money back; but they wouldn't take it. They had what they wanted and didn't need Judas any longer. So, in desperation he threw the money at their feet and he went out and killed himself. He felt no hope.

We wonder what could have happened if the heart of Judas had been different. Judas was not the only person that failed that night. We remember Peter's failure in the courtyard. Judas betrayed him but Peter denied him. But the two reacted differently to their failure. Peter realized what he had done after denying Jesus three times and his heart was broken and he truly repented. He restored that relationship with the Lord. Peter accepted the Lord's mercy and forgiveness. Judas failed to recognize the forgiving nature of the Lord. I feel confident that if Judas had responded in the way Peter did, then the Lord would have extended his mercy and forgiveness to Judas as well.

There is always the hope of beginning again with Jesus. No matter what you have done or how deeply you have sinned, he is willing to forgive when you accept his terms. He was willing to forgive Saul of Tarsus; he was willing to forgive Simon Peter; he was willing to forgive those that put him on the cross. With Jesus there is always the hope of beginning again. Some people fail and never reach their full potential in the Christian life because they feel the Lord could never forgive them, but he can. ***Col 1:13-14 Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: (14) In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.*** In Jesus there is a living hope. ***1 Peter 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.***

Where are you in your relationship with the Lord? I hope epithet at the end of your life is not "it might have been." Want you let your life be what the Lord wants it to be. It begins by becoming one of his thru obedience to the gospel.

Invitation. The choice is yours.