

Introduction

The Bible is full of great teachers of the word of God who teach us very valuable lessons about the Christian life. Men like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob teach us how to live a life of faith in the face of trials; men like Moses, David and Solomon teach us how to live by the law of God in our day to day lives; and the Lord Jesus Himself teaches us the way of salvation and what we need to do in order to get saved.

But it is not only the good and the godly who have important lessons to teach us. Even those who lived lives of great sin can teach us something by their example. This is why Jesus said, "Remember Lot's wife" (Luke 17:32). Lot's wife was not a saved woman, but her behaviour teaches us vital lessons in obedience.

Judas Iscariot is perhaps the most hated person in the New Testament. He was the disciple who betrayed the Son of God Himself to His enemies and then took his own life. We all accept that he was a very wicked man. But this does not mean that we can ignore Judas. He is one of the few disciples of Christ whose activities are mentioned in all four gospels: clearly he is there as an example to us.

In this booklet, we look at the teachings of Bishop J.C. Ryle on Judas, the false apostle. Bishop Ryle wrote about Judas in his books, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* and in some of his sermons. We have taken all of his teaching and distilled it into seven points: seven significant things we can learn from the life of Judas Iscariot.

Before you begin to read Bishop Ryle's teachings on Judas, there is an important matter that you need to keep in mind. You need to keep in mind that Judas Iscariot was not at any time in his life a saved man. It is the opinion of many Christians in our country today that Judas was saved until he betrayed Christ and that he lost his salvation when he went to the high priests and agreed to betray the Son of God to them. These people believe that when Judas was called by Christ and sent by Christ to preach the kingdom and work miracles that he was a saved man. This, however, is simply not the truth.

The Bible's teaching on the matter is very clear: Judas was never saved at any point in his life. Judas was born unsaved as we all are, and he remained unsaved throughout his life and he died unsaved. He pretended to be saved, but all the time that he was with Christ and appeared to serve Christ and to preach the word of Christ, he was himself an unsaved man. We know this because the Bible teaches us plainly that the person who is saved will never lose his salvation. It is simply not possible to be saved and then to lose our salvation; not

even Judas could do that. We know this because Jesus said, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one" (Jn. 10:27-30). The teaching of Jesus is very clear here: it is He who gives eternal life to sinners, and once He has given eternal life to someone and saved them, then that person can never lose his salvation: "No one can snatch them out of my hand."

This sometimes confuses people. Are we then saying that an unsaved man preached the word of God and did miracles? The answer, quite simply, is "Yes, that is exactly what we are saying." We are saying that simply because a person preaches the Bible and does signs and wonders does not necessarily mean that he is saved. We are saying that the Bible teaches that unsaved people can preach and can appear to do miracles. Just because God gives people the ability to do something does not mean that person is saved.

Look carefully at the words of the Lord Jesus on what will happen on the Day of Judgement: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evil-doers'" (Matt. 7:21-23). This passage tells us that on the Day of Judgement there are many who will call Jesus "Lord," and will say to Him that they prophesied in His name and drove out demons and performed many miracles. Now Jesus does not deny that they did all these things, He simply says, "I never knew you." He means that all the time they were prophesying and driving out demons and performing miracles, they were not saved people: He never knew them. He does not say, "I knew you when you were doing these things, but then you fell into sin and lost your salvation." He says to them, "I never knew you, not even at the time when you were prophesying and doing miracles in my name."

It is quite clear then, that there are people in the world today like Judas who preach the word of God and appear to do signs and wonders but actually are not saved at all. This is why Judas is such an important example for us in the Bible.

“Then one of the Twelve – the one called Judas Iscariot – went to the chief priests and asked, ‘What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?’ So they counted out for him thirty silver coins. From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over.”

*“When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve. And while they were eating, he said, ‘I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me.’ They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, ‘Surely not I, Lord?’ Jesus replied, ‘The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would have been better for him if he had not been born.’ Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, ‘Surely not I, Rabbi?’ Jesus answered, ‘Yes, it is you.’
(Matt. 26:14-16; 20-25).*

In this passage we read how the Lord Jesus Christ was betrayed into the hands of his enemies. The priests and the scribes were very anxious to put Him to death but they feared the people and so could not arrest Him. Then, one of Jesus’ own disciples, Judas Iscariot, came and offered himself to them. This false apostle offered to betray his Master into their hands for thirty pieces of silver.

The history of Christianity is full of astonishing truths, but the character and conduct of Judas Iscariot is one of the most amazing things we will ever hear about. Judas proves beyond doubt that the heart of man is a sinful heart. Let us see what lessons we can learn from this man Judas Iscariot.

1. We learn in the first place, that one of those whom the Lord Jesus chose to be His apostles was a false disciple and a traitor.

Let us remember that the Lord Jesus Christ was fully God. Let us remember that when He chose Judas Iscariot He knew everything about Judas. He knew that Judas was a false disciple and a wicked man who loved money. On the day that the Lord Jesus chose Judas to be one of His disciples, He knew that one day this man would go to the chief priests and betray Him for money. All these things the Lord Jesus knew when He chose Judas to be one of His disciples. So the question arises: Why then did Jesus appoint Judas to be an apostle? The answer is this: Jesus appointed Judas because He wanted His people throughout history to learn some vitally important lessons. The Lord Jesus is full of wisdom. He wanted to teach His people in all times and in all places certain vital lessons, and that was His reason for choosing Judas.

(i) Jesus chose Judas to teach pastors and preachers everywhere to be humble. It is often the case that if a man has been to Bible college and has been ordained as a pastor then he immediately thinks that he has the approval of God upon him and that he will enter heaven when he dies. You do not often meet a pastor who is willing to examine himself to see if he is truly saved. He thinks that because he has been trained and ordained then he must automatically be a saved man. He cannot believe that he is an unsaved man. He knows he has been ordained to be a preacher, so he thinks to himself, “I must be a child of God.” But Judas teaches us to be careful about this matter. Judas was trained by Christ Himself and Judas was ordained by Christ Himself, and yet Judas was an unsaved man. Despite the fact that he was trained and ordained by Christ, he was unsaved and in the end he went into hell. Let no one think that because he is trained and ordained he is automatically saved. It is possible for a person to be trained and ordained and yet be unsaved and on his way to hell.

(ii) Jesus chose Judas to teach church members not to treat pastors as idols. There are many in the world today who show a lot of respect to those who are pastors. Now it is true that those who are pastors should be treated with honour and respect. But it is not right that pastors should be treated as idols. People must not think that all pastors are men of God who have the seal of approval of God upon them. Judas was chosen by Jesus to be an apostle and a preacher but he was not a saved man.

(iii) Jesus chose Judas to teach Christians everywhere that there are many people in the world who call themselves Christians, but who in fact are not Christians at all. He was chosen to teach us that among those who call themselves Christians there are those who are truly saved and those who are not saved at all. Of the twelve disciples, one was an unsaved man. Of those who call themselves the people of God there are many who are unsaved.

2. We learn in the second place that although Judas had many privileges, yet he remained an unsaved man.

Let us for a moment examine the character of this man Judas.

(i) Judas was a man with great privileges.

He was chosen to be an apostle of Christ and he was a companion of Christ for three whole years. Judas saw with his own eyes the miracles that Jesus did, and he heard with his own ears the teachings that Jesus gave. He saw things that men like Abraham and Moses never saw, he heard teachings that men like David and Isaiah never heard. Not only was Judas a

companion of Christ, but he was also a companion of great servants of Christ like Peter, James and John. Yet despite all his privileges, Judas remained unsaved all his life and died an unsaved man.

(ii) Judas professed to be a follower of Christ.

When we look at Judas's outward behaviour we see that he appeared to be a genuine follower of Christ. Like the other disciples, he gave up everything he had and followed Christ. Like the other disciples, he seemed to live a godly life. It is a remarkable truth that when Jesus said, "One of you shall betray me," none of the disciples said, "It's Judas isn't it? He is the false disciple, isn't he?" He was in the company of men like Peter and James and John for three years and in all that time they never suspected for a moment that he was an unsaved man. And yet all this time Judas was unsaved. It shows us that a man may appear to be a genuine Christian who is saved for many years and yet all the time his heart is full of sin and wickedness and hypocrisy.

(iii) Judas was called by Christ Himself to be a preacher of His word.

Judas went with the other eleven disciples to the towns and villages of Israel to preach the kingdom and to work miracles. He was a preacher of the word of God and yet he was unsaved. Just because he was appointed a preacher by the Lord Jesus did not mean he was a saved man. This is a great lesson to all who are pastors and preachers. Do not think that just because you have been appointed to be a pastor and a preacher you are a saved person. Judas was appointed a preacher and Judas was given the power to work miracles, and yet all this time he was an unsaved man. There are many in our world today who preach the word of God and claim to work miracles and yet they are unsaved.

Judas Iscariot was a man with great privileges; he was a man who appeared to everyone to be a follower of Christ; he was a man who was appointed by Christ Himself to preach and to work miracles. And yet all this time, he was "the son of perdition" who was unsaved and in the end went into hell.

3. We learn in the third place, that the love of money is a great danger to the soul of man.

Judas Iscariot was called by the Lord Jesus to follow Him; Judas claimed to be a follower and a servant of Christ; Judas was a preacher of the word of God, and in the end Judas went

into hell. Why? It is because Judas loved money. We see this in his question to the chief priests, "What will you give me?"

It is very likely that Judas was there when the Lord Jesus said, "Take heed and beware of covetousness" (Lk. 12:15). It is very likely that Judas was there when Jesus said, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money" (Matt. 6:19-21;24).

But Judas was like many people today. They hear very clear, very direct teaching from the word of God on a Sunday, but by the time Monday comes they have forgotten all of it and become just like the rest of the world. They know that the Bible teaches us very clearly about the dangers of loving money. They know that the Bible says, "People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves" (1 Tim. 6:9-10). These things are clearly written in the Bible and sometimes we hear teaching about these things very clearly. And yet when people go to their place of work on Monday, they have forgotten all this teaching from the Bible. They love the world and the things of the world just as much as the unsaved person. They pursue money and the things of this world just as much as Judas did. And they show by their behaviour that they are just like Judas: Christians on Sunday and worldly the rest of the week. They forget that this sort of Christianity is a false Christianity; it is a Christianity that will never save. This was the Christianity of Judas and Judas went into hell.

The lesson of Judas Iscariot is one that pastors in particular need to learn. If a man calls himself a pastor or a preacher and yet loves money, then he is like Judas: a Christian on the outside only. If he pursues the Christian ministry because he loves money and wants to make money from it, then he is like Judas who stole money that belonged to the Lord (Jn. 12:6). Such a person has the Christianity of Judas and he will have the final destiny of Judas: he will be in hell for eternity. We can deceive other people, but we cannot deceive God, and it is God who will judge us at the end. If we have love for money hidden in our hearts, and we pursue the Christian ministry because we love money and power and honour, then no matter how good we may appear on the outside, the fact is that we are not

saved at all and this hidden sin will one day be revealed, just as it was with Judas and it will take a person to hell, just as it took Judas to hell.

Let us watch ourselves very carefully with regard to love of money. The Bible is full of examples of how people have fallen into great sin because they loved money. It was for money that Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery; it was the love of money that caused Balaam to agree to curse Israel; it was for money that Delilah betrayed Samson into the hands of the Philistines; it was the love of money that made Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, a leper; it was love of money that caused Ananias and Sapphira to try and deceive Peter; and it was the love of money that caused Judas to betray the Son of God. "The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil" (1 Tim. 6:10). Never let us forget this truth.

4. We learn in the fourth place, that the heart of the unsaved person is hard and full of sin.

We read in the Bible the account of the Last Supper when the Lord Jesus met with His disciples in the upper room. At this supper, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray me" (Jn. 13:21). We might have thought that when Judas heard these words his conscience would be troubled and that he would think again about what he was going to do. Later during the same supper, the Lord Jesus said plainly to Judas, "What you are about to do, do quickly" (Jn. 13:27). Again, we would have thought that these plain words of the Lord Jesus would have made Judas think about what he was planning to do, that he would have been ashamed of his plans.

But Judas does none of this. His heart was hardened against the word of God; he had made up his mind to betray the Son of God and nothing was going to stop him. He had buried his conscience so that it did not speak to him about what he was planning to do. And so he stood up and went from the presence of the Lord. Later that same evening, he guided Christ's enemies to where He was and identified Him with a kiss. The Bible tells us plainly that when they arrested Christ, "Judas the traitor was standing there with them" (Jn. 18:5). This is the man who claimed to be a follower of Christ for three years and who claimed to be a preacher of the word of God. He led the enemies of Christ to where He was and stood and watched as they arrested Him. In this, Judas teaches us two vital lessons.

(i) Judas teaches us that a man may know a great amount of Biblical truth and yet he is able to fall into very great sin. Let us beware of thinking that just because we know the Bible

and the teachings of the Bible that this knowledge will save us. We may know a lot of doctrinal truth and we may be able to teach others, and yet we could have a sinful heart that will take us into hell, just like Judas. We could hear the best preaching and teaching in the world and yet remain unsaved and go into hell in the end. Let us especially make sure that we examine our hearts to make sure that there is no secret sin there. One sin like the love of money or the love of honour can take us into hell just as one hole can sink a whole ship.

(ii) Judas teaches us that the word of God can sometimes harden a person's heart to such an extent that he is able to commit the worst of sins without a conscience. For three years Judas had listened to the teaching of Christ. During this time, his heart became harder and harder as he resisted more and more the teaching of the Son of God. Finally, his heart was so hard that he was able to go and betray Christ without feeling shame. A person who listens to preaching from the Bible week after week but does not repent is in great danger. Each week he resists the word of God and each week his heart becomes harder and harder. After a while he is able to sin without shame or sorrow; he becomes hardened to all warnings and all invitations to come to Christ. Let us guard our hearts very carefully against the sin of resisting the word of God.

5. We learn in the fifth place, that our enemy the devil is very clever.

When we read John chapter 13, we find that the devil first "prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus" (Jn. 13:2); then we are told, "Satan entered into him" (Jn. 13:27). We see here the devices of Satan. First he suggests, then he commands. First he knocks at the door and asks permission to come in, then, once admitted, he takes complete possession, and rules the whole of the man.

Let us take heed that we are not "ignorant of Satan's devices." He is still going back and forth in the earth, seeking whom he may devour. Our only safety lies in resisting him right from the first, and not listening to his first suggestions. This is our duty: to resist him. Satan may be very strong, but he cannot harm us if we cry out to the Lord to help us. The Bible says clearly, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." (James 4:7.)

The person who begins to play with sin rather than resisting it is in great danger of falling into great sin. The person who allows sinful thoughts to come into his mind, the person who treats sin as a light and easy thing, the person who allows the world to flatter him and put bad thoughts into him is in great danger of falling into great sin. Remember that great sins have small beginnings. The road to destruction starts slowly and then gradually leads us into hell. If you allow a small sin to enter, it will soon bring in many big sins and you will be completely defeated by sin. Let us make sure that we watch and pray and not play with sin.

6. We learn in the sixth place, that very often the person who repents near the end of his life is not genuine in his repentance.

We are told plainly that "When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and elders" (Matt. 27:3). We are even told that he went to the priests, and said, "I have sinned" (Matt. 27:4). And yet it is clear that his repentance did not lead to salvation: Judas did not get saved but was eternally lost.

This is a point which deserves special attention. We often hear preachers saying, "it is never too late to repent." This, no doubt, is true: it never is too late to repent. The problem, however, is that a death-bed repentance is very often not genuine. When a man is on his death-bed, he will see that he has lived a very sinful life and he begins to regret that he has been so bad. He knows that he is going to die soon and that he will either go to heaven or to hell. All this he knows. And so purely out of fear, he will say all kinds of things. He will pray all sorts of prayers and make all sorts of confessions. However, despite all this, he does not repent from his heart. He sees his danger and he fears death so he says all sorts of things, but there is no work of the Holy Spirit in his soul. This is not genuine repentance, it is something done out of fear, not because he hates his sin and wants to give up his sin and serve God in his life.

Let us beware of trusting in death-bed repentance. The Bible says, "Now is the accepted time. Today is the day of salvation." One thief was saved in the hour of death so that no man might despair, but only one was saved so that we should not become careless. Do not put off those matters that concern your soul, and above all do not put off repentance. Do not think that you can repent at any time. Remember the longer you resist the word of God, the harder your heart becomes and the more difficult it becomes to repent. Remember also these words of God: "Since you rejected me when I called and no one gave heed when I stretched out my hand, since you ignored all my advice and would not accept my rebuke, I in turn will laugh at your disaster; I will mock when calamity overtakes you – when calamity overtakes you like a storm, when disaster sweeps over you like a whirlwind, when trouble and distress overwhelm you. Then you will call to me but I will not answer; they will look for me but will not find me" (Prov. 1:24-28).

7. We learn in the seventh place that the person who dies unsaved dies a terrible death.

The Lord Jesus said of Judas, "It would have been better for that man, if he had not been born" (Matt. 26:24). These words teach us plainly that it is better never to live at all than to live without faith and to die without grace. The person who dies without forgiveness of sins and without salvation is ruined in hell eternally. From this state there is no rescue and no salvation; hell is an eternal place, and those who go there go there for eternity. There is

a deep valley between heaven and hell that no one can cross. The Bible teaches clearly that all who are unsaved will be in hell for eternity. The Bible never teaches us that the unsaved will somehow or other enter heaven. If they die unsaved, they remain in hell unsaved.

Notice carefully that after Jesus was arrested, "Judas threw the money into the temple and left" (Matt. 27:9). He threw the thirty pieces of silver for which he had sold his master into the temple and went away in bitterness of soul. This was money that he had wanted desperately. He had agreed to betray the Son of God for this money, this is how much the money had meant to him at one time. But then when his end came, it brought him no pleasure and no comfort. The Bible says, "Ill-gotten treasures are of no value" (Prov. 10:2).

Sin is, in truth, the hardest of all masters. It promises its servants all sorts of pleasures but in the end it gives nothing but despair. Those who love sin and live a life of sin may find a few pleasures here and there while they are on earth, but their eternal place is in hell.

Are you tempted to live a life of sin? Remember the words of Scripture, "Your sin will find you out," and resist the temptation. Remember that sooner or later you will stand before the judge of all mankind and give an account of your sins. Then on that day you will find that your life of sin will bring you no profit at all (Rom. 6:21).

Judas reminds us that those who live a life of sin come to a terrible end. We are told, "Then he went away and hanged himself" (Matt. 27:5). What a dreadful death to die! An apostle of Christ, a former preacher of the Gospel, a companion of Peter and John, commits suicide, and rushes into God's presence unprepared and unforgiven.

Let us never forget that the person who lives a life of sin despite knowing the word of God and the way of salvation clearly is the greatest of all sinners. It is this person who provokes God to anger more than anyone else and it is such people who are removed from this earth suddenly. Remember Lot's wife, Pharaoh, Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, and Saul king of Israel. They are all examples of people who sinned against God despite knowing the will of God and they were all judged by God severely.

These, then are the seven lessons we learn from the life of Judas Iscariot. Let us take these lessons to heart and seek to learn from them so that we may not make the mistakes he made.