

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 16 November 2025. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

The Price of Betrayal

Matthew 26:14-25

One of the most well-known catastrophes in ancient history was the destruction of the Roman city of **Pompeii** on 17 October, A.D. 79, when Mount Vesuvius erupted. Modern excavations show that thousands of souls perished that day. Only moments before the eruption, people had been going about their daily tasks; and the skeletal remains of many of the victims give us a “snapshot” glimpse of exactly what they were doing in the last moments of their lives.

Now, there is one particular activity that some of the victims of Mount Vesuvius appear to have been doing: they were **grasping money, or jewels**. The skeleton of one lady was found with her feet oriented toward the city gate, but with her face turned back, and with her hands stretched out in the same direction that she was looking. What was she looking at, and grasping for? Pearls! Just beyond the reach of her hands was a bag of pearls; and to this day, her frozen fingers show that in the last seconds of her life, those pearls were the thing that she was thinking about! You’d think that she would have been more concerned about running for her life; but instead, she stopped to grab those pearls. Another woman’s skeleton was found lying in a fetal position on her bed, in her beautiful, stately house; and in her hands were some gold coins, which she was gripping tightly.

Losing your physical life because you were busy trying to grab a few coins is tragic; but losing *eternal* life for love of money is unspeakably tragic! This morning, we will focus on a man who did exactly that. He literally passed up the offer of eternal life for a bag of money—even though he had been in the very presence of the Son of God for three years, and had been called Jesus’ “friend” and Apostle. This man died rejecting the Saviour; and to this day, he is still crying out in agony. You all know his name: it is **Judas Iscariot**. This morning, we are going to take a look at what Judas did, and why he did it; and as we do so, we will examine our own hearts. The title of this message is ***The Price of Betrayal***.

Read Matthew 26:14-25.

I. The temporal prize for Judas’ betrayal (vv. 14-16)

In our last message from **Matthew**, we read about a great kindness that was done to the Lord, by a woman named **Mary of Bethany**. Out of pure love, Mary had emptied a whole bottle of expensive ointment on Jesus' head and feet, and had wiped His feet with her own hair. But now, we read about a great *unkindness* that was done to the Lord, by **Judas Iscariot**. Mary selflessly *gave* Jesus a gift, which cost her a great deal; but in contrast, Judas selfishly *betrayed* Jesus, so that he could get his hands on some quick cash.

Now, how was this possible? How could a man who had been chosen by Jesus to be His Apostle, and who had seen Jesus raise the dead, cast out devils, and heal the deaf, dumb, lame, blind, paralytics, and lepers, have done such an unspeakably evil thing? What was going through his head? Well, I believe we can find a clue at the beginning of **verse 14**. You'll notice that **verse 14** begins with the word **"then."** Why is this word important? Because in Greek, the word for **"then"** (*tote*) introduces a new story; and it also indicates that this new story is the *direct result* of the *previous* story. What, then, was the story that Matthew just got done telling us about? **The supper at Bethany**. Apparently, there was something that happened during that feast in Bethany that "triggered" Judas, and got him thinking about how he could betray Jesus. What was that event? Let's go back a few verses, and see what we can learn. **(Read Matthew 26:8-13.)**

What are we reading about in these verses? We're reading about a church feud! The members of Christ's assembly were all out of sorts over the finances. Particularly, they were riled up about how "wasteful" Mary had been in pouring out that spikenard on Jesus' feet; and Jesus had to rebuke them for their attitude. He rebuked them for their lack of faith, and for their harsh treatment of Mary. But who was the one who stirred up this pot, and got everyone upset about the spikenard? It was the one church member who wasn't truly saved—Judas Iscariot!

Read John 12:4-6.

What "triggered" Judas, and got him thinking about betraying the Lord? It appears that it was a couple things. First, it was **wounded pride**. Judas was angry at the Lord because He had dared to rebuke him, right there in front of everyone; and as he turned this over in his mind, he began to entertain thoughts of revenge. In his sinful, darkened mind, Judas actually thought that the Lord had wronged him—when it was actually just the opposite. The Lord, out of *love* for Judas, had rebuked him for his error, and had attempted to correct him.

Read Proverbs 18:24 and 27:6.

Jesus is the truest Friend that anyone could ever have. Jesus *always* speaks the truth—even when it hurts. Like a true Friend, Jesus had corrected Judas’ fleshly thinking, by showing him that what Mary had done was *right*. Mary had believed Jesus’ word (particularly, His warning that He was about to be crucified, and buried, and rise again the third day); and she had *acted* upon her faith by pouring spikenard on Jesus’ body, in preparation for His burial. Jesus commended her for that act of love and sacrifice, and rebuked Judas (and everyone else who had joined him) for giving her a hard time about this. Judas *should* have, and *could* have, responded to Jesus’ rebuke by humbling himself, and truly repenting of his sin, and believing on Jesus. However, Judas made the wrong choice. The Holy Spirit was pricking and convicting his heart, as He had been doing for three years; but Judas resisted the Spirit’s conviction, and hardened his heart in pride.

The **“pride of life”** is one of the primary roots of all sin; and Judas’ heart was full of it. But that’s not all. Judas’ heart was also filled with the **love of money**—which the Bible says is the root of all evil. This sin led Judas to commit the crime of the ages. This crime was prophesied by Zechariah 500 years before Christ’s birth.

Read 1 Timothy 6:3-10.

Read Zechariah 11:12.

God had given Judas a natural ability to work with money; and it also seems that Judas was the most highly educated among the twelve disciples. Judas could have used his talents to serve the Lord mightily, in his position of Apostle; but instead, he chose to use this talent to serve himself, by *embezzling* money from the church treasury. Now, don’t misunderstand: Judas, on an intellectual level, did believe that Jesus was the Messiah; otherwise, he wouldn’t have stuck it out with Jesus for three years. However, he never had true, saving faith in Christ. You see, Judas didn’t see Jesus as his *Lord*. Judas never addressed Jesus as “Lord”: he always addressed Him as *Rabbi* (which means “master,” in the sense of “teacher”). Earlier in Jesus’ ministry, Judas figured that Jesus would soon raise up an army, and overthrow Rome, and become the King of all the earth; and since he was Jesus’ treasurer, *he* would have access to the great wealth of the nations, which would flow into Jerusalem. But now, the tide was turning against Jesus—big time! Jesus Himself was telling them that He would soon die on the cross—which meant that His church would be disbanded, and there would be no more treasury into which he could dip his hand. Not only that, but Jesus had, more than once, actually *turned down* the opportunity to be King of Israel; and at the supper in Bethany, Jesus had turned down the opportunity to take that spikenard from Mary, and turn it into money.

Judas figured, “This ship is going down; and I’m going to jump ship while I can. And while I’m at it, I may as well make a few shekels.” Perhaps Judas even figured that by betraying Jesus, he could *force Jesus’ hand*. If Jesus *wasn’t* really the Messiah, then He would end up dead, as all false messiahs do; and by betraying Jesus, Judas could at least make a little money. But if Jesus really *were* the Messiah, then His arrest would force Him to use His divine power against His enemies. The battle of the ages would ensue; and when the dust was cleared, Jesus would be sitting on the throne of David, and *Judas* would be sitting on a throne, too—with access to the money. Either way, Judas was going to make sure that *he came out on top*.

Judas had rejected the light of the Holy Spirit; and because he had rejected that light, whatever light he *did* once have was now taken away from him. His mind was in such gross darkness, that he didn’t even seem to realise that Jesus knew his innermost thoughts, and evil schemes. He was not a “heavenly man,” with heavenly citizenship; he was an earthly man, with earthly citizenship: and he thought as a worldling. He did not understand the things of the Spirit of God, because the things of God were foolishness to him; neither could he know them, because they were spiritually discerned. And so it is with many people today. Many people today are “Judases.” They look, act, and talk like Christians; but they are not true children of God. They may go to church, and do the outwardly “Christian” things; but their hearts have never been converted: and their sinful lives reveal that there is no reality to their salvation testimony. Like Judas, they always wanted certain things of *this* world from Jesus; but when those things don’t appear to be forthcoming, they turn their backs on Jesus, and walk away from Him forever (and crucify Him in their hearts). My friend, are *you* a Judas? Are *you* about to turn away from Christ because you aren’t getting what you wanted from Him? If so, I urge you not to draw back from Jesus, but to believe on Him, and be saved! The Bible says, ***“Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.”*** If you choose this world, then “thirty pieces of silver” is all you will get. You will be like that woman in Pompeii, who perished with her fingers grasping for the pearls, but was never able to obtain them. But if you place your faith in Jesus, you will have an inheritance ***“incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you.”***

II. The preparation for the Passover (vv. 17-19)

(Read verses 17-19 again.) The time that Jesus had been foretelling throughout His ministry was now at hand. Within 24 hours, Jesus would be hanging on a Roman cross, and paying for the sins of the world. However, before going to the cross, Jesus had a very important appointment to keep: and that appointment was His last Passover meal with His disciples.

Now, you'll notice that in **verse 17**, we are told that it was ***"the first day of the feast of unleavened bread."*** What does this mean? Well, the Bible says in **Leviticus 23**, ***"In the fourteenth day of the first month at even is the LORD'S passover. And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the feast of unleavened bread unto the LORD: seven days ye must eat unleavened bread."*** In other words, Passover Day came first (on the 14th of Nisan); and the next day (the 15th) was the first day of the Feast of Unleavened bread; and this feast lasted for seven days. So, which day was it? Was it now the Passover Day? Or was it the first day of Unleavened Bread, which comes the day *after* Passover Day?

The answer is: it was **Passover Day**. In Luke's Gospel, Luke says that Jesus ate the Passover meal on ***"the day of unleavened bread, when the Passover must be killed"*** (in other words, on Passover Day). Also, in **John 18**, we are told that on the morning of Jesus' trial, the religious leaders wouldn't go into the house of the Gentile governor Pilate, ***"lest they should be defiled,"*** and thus not able to eat the Passover meal. It definitely was Passover Day. Why, then, did Matthew call it ***"the first day of the feast of unleavened bread"***? Was it Passover Day, or was it the first day of Unleavened Bread? Again, the answer is: it was Passover Day. You see, the Jews lumped the feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread together, and treated it as one. They called the entire eight days "Unleavened Bread." That is exactly what we see here in **Matthew 26:17**. Matthew calls Passover "the first day of unleavened bread" because beginning with Passover Day, the Jews were not permitted to eat any unleavened bread. The Passover was, in reality, the first of *eight* days in which they were not to eat any leaven.

So, then, when did the Passover Day begin? It officially began at 6:00 p.m. Jewish days begin not at midnight, as ours do, but at 6:00 p.m. So, at sometime after 6:00 p.m. (right after Passover Day had officially *begun*), Jesus sat down to eat the Passover meal.

However, this brings up another question: Wasn't the Passover to be eaten on the *evening* of Passover (in other words, at the *very end* of Passover day, between 3:00 and 6:00 p.m.)? Yes, it was. Passover *Day* was from 6 p.m. to 6 p.m.; but the *Passover Feast* was to be eaten between 3 and 6 p.m., at the *end* of Passover Day. However, Jesus and His disciples were eating their meal after 6:00 p.m., at the *very beginning* of Passover Day. In contrast, everyone else in Israel would be eating their meal about 21 hours later, at the *close* of Passover Day.

So, this leads to one more important question: *Why* did Jesus eat Passover 21 hours earlier than all the other Jews did? Technically, it was Passover Day; but why did He eat Passover at the *beginning* of Passover Day, instead of at the *end* of Passover Day, as God had commanded Moses? The answer is simple: Jesus had to keep the

most important appointment in history! It was an appointment that He could not miss. Right at "the ninth hour" on Passover Day (at 3:00 p.m., when the Passover lambs began to be slain in the Temple), Jesus died for the sins of all mankind. Think of that! The *real* Lamb of God died at the *very hour* when the sacrificial lambs in the Temple died. Is that a coincidence? Not on your life! For 1,400 years, Israel had been doing "dress rehearsals" of redemption, by sacrificing their lambs at 3:00 p.m. on Passover Day; and now, the *real* Lamb of God laid down His life at that very hour!

I'd say that this was a legitimate reason for Jesus to celebrate the Passover meal a little early, wouldn't you? Jesus was not breaking the Law of Moses by celebrating the Passover 21 hours early; He was *keeping* the Law. The fact is, God Himself had allowed the Jews to celebrate the Passover on the 14th day of the *second* month (a month *after* the real Passover) if they had happened to be ritually unclean at the day of Passover. Why, then would God not allow His Son to celebrate His last Passover meal 21 hours early, so that He could become the *real* Passover Lamb at the precise hour of Pesach? God is all-powerful and sovereign; and everything on that Passover Day happened at exactly the right time.

Now, let's look at *how* this Passover meal was arranged. It was now after 6 p.m., at the beginning of Passover Day; but the Passover meal wouldn't begin to be eaten by anyone else until about 21 hours later. Yet, someone in Jerusalem just "happened" to have a Passover meal ready that evening! Jesus, in His divine omniscience, knew exactly where this house was; and He sent Peter and John to request that the master of that house allow Him and His disciples to eat the Passover there. Many believe that the master of that house was John Mark, the nephew of Barnabas (although we don't know for certain). One thing is certain, though: God had put it into the heart of the owner of that house to make the Passover meal nearly a whole 24 hours *early*! The person who lived at this house was, evidently, a believer in Jesus; and this believer responded to the quiet nudging of the Holy Spirit that evening, even though it didn't seem to make any sense. Christian, this is the way you should be, too—always sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit! Let's look at Luke's Gospel, and see how this played out.

Read Luke 22:7-13.

This is curious, isn't it? Why did Jesus commission Peter and John to make this arrangement in this strange way? Why didn't Jesus simply go straight to the man's house, along with all His disciples, and make the arrangement Himself? Well, for one thing, Jesus was giving Peter and John an opportunity to serve Him. (The Lord delights in using us to do His will—even for the "little" tasks!) However, I believe there was a deeper reason. You see, by sending only Peter and John to this man's house, Jesus was preventing Judas from knowing where they would be eating that night. If Judas had known where they would be that evening, he could have gone to the Sanhedrin earlier in the day, to give them that information; and if this had

happened, Jesus might have been tried and crucified before nightfall—which would have made Jesus’ death *not* on Passover Day. At the very least, Jesus wouldn’t have been able to have that Last Passover meal with His disciples. He wouldn’t have been able to institute the Lord’s Supper; and He wouldn’t have been able to give them all the important truths that He gave them that evening. **Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 22, and John 13-18** all record the things that Jesus said at the Last Supper, and during their walk to Gethsemane; but if Jesus had been arrested earlier in the evening, none of these things would have been said. God knew exactly what He was doing! **Christian, you can *always* trust the Lord.** He knows what He is doing, even when you don’t have a clue. Just trust Him! The Bible says, ***“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”***

III. The eternal price for Judas’ betrayal (vv. 20-25)

(Read Matthew 26:20-25.) We’ve seen that Judas received a **temporal prize** for his betrayal of the Lord; and that prize was thirty pieces of silver. However, that temporal prize came at an *eternal price*; and that price was eternity in hell. Judas *could* have been saved from his sin, and have served the Lord Jesus Christ alongside the other eleven Apostles. He *could* have spent eternity with the Christ who called him to salvation, and who had chosen him to be an Apostle—if *only* he had humbled himself, and received that gift of salvation. Tragically, though, Judas chose to reject the Lord, and exchange the trinkets of this world for his soul!

Now, lest there be any question as to whether Jesus loved Judas, just look at what Jesus did. In **verse 23**, we are told that Jesus handed the bread to Judas after He had dipped it in the sop. Why did Jesus do this? Was it merely a sign that Judas was the one who would betray Him? No. Jesus was making **one last offer** to Judas. He was offering Judas His love and salvation one last time. How do I know? Because in Jewish culture, handing the first piece of bread to someone at the table was a sign of particular love and affection for that person.

Think of this! Even though Judas was about to betray Jesus, Jesus was *still* extending His love to him. Jesus truly loved Judas, and wanted him to repent of his sin, and be saved. Yet, in spite of all the love that Jesus had shown him, Judas actually had the audacity to receive the bread (thus leaving the other disciples with the impression that he was still Jesus’ friend); and he continued on with his purpose to betray Jesus. By the way, the disciples were so sure that Judas was one of them, that even after Jesus had said all these things, some of them *still* thought that Judas was just going to run an errand for Jesus! (We read this in **John 13:29**.) Judas was

a hypocrite through and through. To the very last, he kept up his facade of being Jesus' friend—all the while preparing to betray Jesus.

Now, there's something that you need to understand about what was going on here. Jesus was *not forcing* Judas to betray Him. Judas was *not* predestinated to damnation, without even the offer to be saved. If God were forcing Judas to do this terrible thing against his will, then God would be the author of evil. However, this is not the case. In **John 13:2**, the Bible says that after the Passover meal was over, the devil ***“put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him.”*** In fact, Luke says that Satan had *entered into* Judas. The Bible says that ***“God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.”*** God did not move or entice Judas to do this wicked thing. Yet, because Judas had chosen to reject the light, God turned him over to Satan, and *permitted* Satan to do this terrible thing; and in so doing, God allowed the plan for our redemption to be set in motion. Make no mistake about it, my friends: God is *not* the author of sin! God did not *predestinate* Judas to do evil; but He did, in His *foreknowledge*, know that Judas would betray His Son. Because God knew in advance that Judas would betray Christ, He actually used Judas's rebellion to accomplish His plan.

Now, before we close this morning, there is one more truth I would point out. Let's look at John's Gospel, and see what we can learn about Judas.

Read John 13:21-30.

In the Gospel of **Mark**, we are told that when Jesus made the announcement that one of them would betray Him, *all* the disciples asked, ***“Is it I?”*** That speaks volumes, doesn't it? The disciples had sat under Jesus' teaching for three years; and in that time, the eleven *saved* disciples had come to realise that their hearts were sinful and desperately wicked, and that they therefore couldn't trust their own hearts. Peter was so smitten by his own sinfulness, that on one occasion he had told Jesus, ***“Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”*** When the eleven *saved* disciples said, “Lord, is it I?”, they asked it sincerely. They were actually fearful that they might be capable of doing such a thing! But why did *Judas* ask, ***“Is it I?”*** After all, he knew very well that *he* was the man who was about to betray Jesus. At that very moment, he was preparing to go out and collect his blood-money from the Sanhedrin. Why did he even bother to put on this charade, and act as if he didn't know? Because he had to keep up appearances. As part of his contract with the Sanhedrin, he had to lead the soldiers to Jesus; and in order for that to happen, he had to keep up appearances, so as not to rouse suspicion. (If he had remained silent, he might have given himself away; and the other disciples might have tried to stop him.) To the end, Judas wore the mask; but God knew what was in his heart.

Judas' heart was in gross darkness; and when he went out from the upper room that night, ***"It was night"***—both physically, and spiritually. To this very hour, it is still eternal "night" for Judas, the traitor.

The Bible says in **Proverbs 26**, ***"He that hateth dissembleth with his lips, and layeth up deceit within him; When he speaketh fair, believe him not: for there are seven abominations in his heart. Whose hatred is covered by deceit, his wickedness shall be shewed before the whole congregation. Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein: and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him."*** Judas had flattered and lied with his lips for three years; and he was now digging a pit for the Lord. However, *Judas* was the one who would fall into that pit. One day, at the Great White Throne Judgment, Judas will be cast into the *bottomless* pit, along with the lost of all ages, and with the devil and his angels. Was Judas' crime of betraying the Lord the thing that earned him his place in the Lake of Fire? No. Judas' betrayal of Christ was only one of *countless* offences that he had committed in his lifetime: and *any one* of those offences could have condemned him to hell. The reason that *any* sinner ends up in hell is that he is a rebel against God. **Romans 6:23** says that ***"The wages of sin is death."*** Every one of us, in his natural state, is condemned by his sin; and the punishment for sin is eternal death in hell! However, there is good news. The second half of **Romans 6:23** says, ***"But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."*** Our sin condemns us before a holy God; but God has provided a remedy. God's Son paid the penalty for our sin in full on the cross; and if we will only repent in our hearts, and put our trust in Jesus, He will wash our sins away, and give us the pristine robe of *His own perfect righteousness*. If you have never received that robe of righteousness, please receive it today! *Today*, if you will heed God's voice, harden not your heart, and Judas did. Look to the Lamb of God, and He will save you.

Conclusion: Who is Jesus to you? Is He just a teacher, or miracle-worker? Or is He your personal Lord and Saviour, in whom you have placed your trust, and to whom you have surrendered your life? In a moment, we will have a time of invitation; and if you have any doubts about where you stand with God, please come to the front, and I (or someone else) would be happy to open a Bible and show you how you can be reconciled to God, and know that you have eternal life. Should you be saved already, I would say: let the Lord use your life! Be sensitive to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, and trust Him implicitly. When the Spirit says, "Go to this place, and do my bidding," be like Peter and John, and obey Him without question. You are in the service of the King of kings; so serve Him with all your heart!