

The Sin of Judas: Greed (John 12:1-11)

Expository Lessons from the Gospel of John

I. Background

- a. Jesus had raised Lazarus of Bethany, the brother of Mary and Martha, from the dead after he was four days in the tomb.
- b. As a result of this miracle, more people are following Jesus. The Jewish leaders feel threatened, convene a council (the Sanhedrin), and at the urging of the high priest decide to seize Jesus and then kill Him.

II. Jesus Anointed by Mary, the Sister of Lazarus (Read John 12:1-11)

- a. Outline of the story
 - i. Mary, Martha and Lazarus hold a supper for Jesus in Bethany.
 - ii. This takes place 6 days before the Passover (the same Passover that occurs in the week of the Passion, when Jesus is crucified.)
 - iii. Mary anoints the feet of Jesus with very expensive perfume and wipes His feet with her hair.
 - iv. Judas (the one who would soon betray Jesus) complains about what Mary is doing.
 1. The oil she is using is worth 300 denarii.
 - a. In other words, 300 silver coins, each worth about a day's wage for a typical worker.
 - b. Therefore, the value of the precious oil was about a year's wages. (Translating that to our world in the US, perhaps the equivalent of \$40,000 - \$80,000?)
 2. Judas complains, "What a waste! This could have been used to help the poor!"
 - a. Judas is being deceitful. He kept the group's money bag, into which funds were collected for meeting the needs of the poor; and was in the habit of stealing from it.
 - b. **Question:** Jesus knew Judas had a bad heart; why did He tolerate that?

- v. Jesus does not confront Judas' spiritual-sounding corruption, but instead says that this is a special situation: Jesus being anointed for His burial!
 - 1. Jesus responds, "The poor you will always have with you, but you won't always have Me".
 - 2. (In other words, there will be plenty of opportunities to help the poor after I am gone. However, now is a special occasion: anointing Me for my death.)
- vi. Lazarus is drawing attention as well.
 - 1. Imagine: people are eager to see Lazarus, perhaps to ask him what it was like to die and come back to life!
 - 2. The chief priests plot to put Lazarus to death as well as Jesus, since many are believing as a result of the resurrection of Lazarus.
- b. **Question:** Why did Jesus allow Judas to continue in His ministry, and even to keep the funds earmarked for the poor, when He knew that Judas was stealing?
 - i. The other disciples did not realize that Judas would be the betrayer, in this instance nor later that week at the Last Supper, when Jesus said, "One of you will betray Me." However, Jesus knew who it was, and what was going on.
 - ii. Satan had a "plant" right in Jesus' inner circle.
 - iii. Throughout the Bible, in the history of God's people, there have always been some wicked people hidden among the righteous.
 - 1. For example, Paul told the Corinthians to expel the wicked person who was living among them. We see this in the book of **Revelation** as well.
 - 2. We will look at more examples of this in today's lesson.
 - 3. As we will see, God allows wicked men to exist among his people, although sooner or later such wickedness will be exposed and addressed.
- c. Consider the sin of Judas.
 - i. Most people identify him as "traitor". When we say that someone is "like Judas" we generally mean the person has switched sides; he has betrayed someone's trust, or he is a false friend. However, let's look deeper.

- ii. **Question:** What was Judas' *real, underlying* spiritual problem?
 - 1. **Answer:** He loved money.
- iii. Consider what Judas was doing, day in and day out, in Jesus' ministry.
 - 1. Hearing strong teaching on love of money, greed, etc.
 - 2. Hearing all the strong teaching about wickedness and the final judgment.
 - 3. Seeing the miracles of Jesus.
 - 4. Seeing the example of Jesus and the other apostles who had given up everything and lived poor.
 - 5. Entrusted to keep the money collected for the poor.
 - 6. YET stealing, covering up, deceitful, leading a double-life. An expert at fooling other people, even spiritual people; and all due to his *love of money*.
- iv. Later the same week Judas would go to the chief priests and ask them, "What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?" And they counted out to him thirty pieces of silver." (**Matthew 26:15**, NKJV)
- v. Judas' greatest sins stemmed from his greed. He loved money more than anything. He would lie, steal, betray, even take from the mouths of the poor.

III. Lessons for Us to Consider, from the Story of Judas:

- a. Don't be shocked when we see corrupt people who are in it for the money, in the kingdom of God. It has always been that way. Some greedy people are *experts at deception* and at winning people over to themselves for the purpose of benefiting financially, including stealing their money.
 - i. Sometimes this shatters people's faith. Yet it should not! There have always been greedy people pretending to be religious, including Judas who was in Jesus' inner circle. Seeing the same today should not surprise us.
 - ii. In the qualifications for overseers/ bishops in **Titus 1** and **1 Timothy 3**, it says they must be "not greedy for money" and "not covetous".
 - iii. We see the character of greed and covetousness displayed in many places in Scripture.
 - 1. The bad shepherds of Israel, in **Ezekiel 34**.

- a. “You drink the milk and clothe yourselves with the wool. You slay the fatlings but do not feed my sheep.” **(Ezekiel 34:3)**
 - b. The bad shepherds grazed on the good pasture themselves and trampled the rest; they drank the clear water but muddied the rest with their feet. They pushed the sheep aside and butted the weak ones with their horns; the sheep were plundered. **(Ezekiel 34:18-21)**
 - c. God rebukes the greedy shepherds; He will take away their sheep and lead them Himself!
2. Balaam, the bought-off prophet in **Numbers 22-24** and **31:8-16**; and **Deuteronomy 23:4-6**.
- a. Balaam was used by God to bless Israel and utter tremendous prophecies about the Christ to come. However, Balaam loved money and ultimately led Israel into adultery with the Moabite women. For this, God destroyed Balaam.
 - b. In describing corrupt leaders and false teachers who will come into the church, Peter points back to the example of Balaam.
 - i. “...They are spots and blemishes, carousing in their own deceptions while they feast with you, having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. They have a heart trained in covetous practices and are accursed children. They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man’s voice restrained the madness of the prophet.” **(2 Peter 2:13–16, NKJV)**
 - c. Jude makes a similar point.
 - i. “Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.” **(Jude 11, NKJV)**

3. Gehazi, the servant of Elisha.
 - a. Read **2 Kings 5:14-16**.
 - i. Elisha refuses any gift after healing Naaman.
 - ii. However, after seeing Elisha heal a very wealthy man, Gehazi seeks a financial reward for himself.
 - b. Read **2 Kings 5:20-27**.
 - i. Gehazi secretly and deceptively sends after Naaman. Why? Because *he loves money!*
 - ii. Gehazi lies to Naaman, and then lies to Elisha.
 - iii. Despite seeing the miracles of God, and despite being used by God in the past, Gehazi gives in to greed. The result: he inherits *Naaman's leprosy*.
4. Ananias and Saphira, who were deceptive and held back money in **Acts 5:1-11**.
5. Let's not be *shocked* when we discover the sin of Judas, greed and covetousness, in the hearts and lives of religious leaders.
- b. Concern for the poor and sharing what we have with them (the opposite of Judas' greed) has always been a foundational part of righteousness.
 - i. Often when people think of "*righteousness*" they often think of it in primarily in the terms of avoiding sinful practices and leading a holy and set-apart lifestyle. For example:
 1. *Don't* drink, smoke, use drugs
 2. *Don't* lie, cheat, steal
 3. *Don't* get involved in sexual sins, lust
 4. Follow rules like the 10 Commandments
 - ii. Certainly, we do need to live holy lives; we must "Pursue peace with all people, *and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.*" (**Hebrews 12:14**, NKJV)
 - iii. However, we must consider what the Bible says it means to live a righteous life. This includes what we do with our money.
 1. Consider how righteousness is portrayed in the book of **Job**, likely the oldest book of the Bible.

- a. God said to Satan regarding Job, “there is none like him on the earth: a blameless, true and God-fearing man, one who abstains from every evil thing.” (**Job 1:8**)
 - b. Later in the book, Job defends his righteous life before God. After discussing his stellar commitment to sexual purity and faithfulness, Job continues...
 - c. Read **Job 31:13-40**.
 - d. Job’s righteousness encompassed what he did with his possessions, to help others in need.
 - i. Job treated his servants well.
 - ii. He aided the weak, widows, orphans.
 - iii. He helped those who were without food or clothing, those who were cold.
 - iv. He brought in strangers and the poor.
 - v. Job was very wealthy, but he was extremely generous to others.
2. Consider how a righteous man is described, in **Ezekiel 18:4-9**.
- a. He will not oppress anyone.
 - b. He gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked.
3. **Question:** Why did Ezekiel (following the Law of Moses) include feeding the hungry and clothing the naked as an essential part of righteousness?
- a. The Law of Moses (10 Commandments) says do not steal and do not covet; but does not talk about helping the poor.
 - b. However, consider **Leviticus 19:9-10, 19:18** and **19:33-34**
 - i. Leave some of your crops for the poor.
 - ii. Love your neighbor as yourself.
 - iii. Must even love the *resident alien* (non-Jew) as you love yourself.

1. Jesus told the Parable of the Good Samaritan in **Luke 10:25-37** to answer the question, “Who is my neighbor?”
 2. However, Moses had addressed this earlier in **Leviticus 19:33-34**; even in the Law of Moses the Jews were called to extend compassion to the aliens who lived among them.
4. John the Baptist came to “prepare the way of the Lord” (**Isaiah 40:3**), preaching that people should repent and produce good fruit. In each case, he gives specific instruction to address the sin of greed. (Perhaps the Jews were doing well in other areas of righteousness, but this was one area where they were weak!)
- a. Read **Luke 3:7-14**.
 - b. The repentance he called each of the three groups of people all had to do with money: being greedy and corrupt, versus being content and sharing what you have to help those in greater need.
 - c. How do you prepare for the Lord? Love your neighbor as yourself. Share what you have with others.
 - d. Regarding sharing *your food and clothing with those who do not have*.
 - i. This is *voluntary giving*; it is NOT using the government to take from some and give to others.
 - ii. In other words, *this is NOT modern-day Marxism or socialism!*
5. Jesus also taught about greed and the importance of being generous. This is the *very opposite* of the character of Judas.
- a. Read **Luke 12:13-34**
 - i. The man who lays up treasure for himself but is not “rich toward God” is a fool, according to Jesus (**Luke 12:20-21**)
 - ii. The direction of Jesus regarding money:
 1. Don’t be greedy and selfish.

2. Don't put your security in your possessions.
 3. Don't be anxious about money.
 4. Don't chase after food and clothing like the nations of the world.
 5. Instead, *sell what you have and give alms to the poor*. That will provide you a treasure in heaven.
 6. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be.
- b. In **Luke 16:19-31**, the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus, the only problem with the rich man is that he did nothing to help out Lazarus (who desired to eat the crumbs with fell from the rich man's table). He goes to a place of torment, from which there is no relief.
- i. He wants someone to warn his five brothers who are still living. However, Abraham tells Lazarus, "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them." (**Luke 16:29**)
 - ii. Jesus, in telling this story, said that *the Law and the Prophets were clear* about the need to show compassion toward others (and the consequences to those who are greedy, who do not show compassion to others).
- c. Jesus also tells the story about Final Judgment (Sheep and the Goats). Read **Matthew 25:31-46**
- i. Both the sheep and goats believe in Jesus and call him "Lord".
 - ii. The righteous inherit eternal life.
 - iii. Those condemned to "everlasting punishment" are surprised by their fate.
 - iv. The difference: whether they fed the hungry, clothed the naked, took in a stranger, visited someone in prison.
- d. The great danger I see around me in American Christianity is the *third soil*. Jesus warned about the

third soil: the plants, choked by thorns, cannot produce the fruit that God expects. This represented those who believe but later are *choked out* by the “*cares, riches and pleasures*” of this life (**Luke 8:14**).

- i. In the parallel account in **Mark** it says, “the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches and the desire for other things... choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.” (**Mark 4:19**)
- e. Also, consider Jesus’ description of the religious Pharisees.
 - i. “Then the Lord said to him, ‘Now you Pharisees make the outside of the cup and dish clean, but your inward part is full of greed and wickedness.’” (**Luke 11:39**, NKJV)
 1. Jesus is concerned about greed in our hearts, not how religious we look on the outside.
6. The apostles taught that our attitude toward money (greed vs. sharing with those in need) would determine where we spend eternity.
 - a. “By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?” (**1 John 3:16-17**, NKJV)
 - b. Read **1 Timothy 6:6-18**.
 - i. Be content with what you have. Do not be envious and covet what others have.
 - ii. Love of money is the root of *all kinds of evil*.
 1. Stealing, lying, corruption, lack of concern for others.
 2. Challenges: taxes, not chasing after work/careers/money, being generous with those in need.
 3. It leads to “foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and

perdition” and has caused some stray from the faith in their greediness and to pierce themselves through with many sorrows.

- iii. Instead, do good, put trust in God alone, and be willing to share what God has given us.
 - iv. These are not easy teachings. For example, how do we plan responsibly for our retirement, without being anxious, greedy, or putting our trust in wealth? We need much wisdom to put all of Jesus’ teachings into practice!
- c. Let us remember that greed was sin that consumed religious leaders Judas, Balaam and Gehazi.
- i. Jesus warned us about repeatedly about the dangers of this sin, as did the apostles.
 - ii. Let’s not be looking down on Judas, but take a hard look at our own hearts and lives. Greed is a sin that can take *anyone* down.

IV. Further Thoughts and Teaching Regarding Our Giving

- a. We must give quietly and secretly. This is not to make you or your group look good before men.
 - i. “Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.” (**Matthew 6:1-4**, NKJV)
- b. Give cheerfully and voluntarily, not under compulsion.
 - i. “So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.” (**2 Corinthians 9:7**, NKJV)
 - ii. Several modern translations (NIV, ESV, RSV, etc.) render this, “not reluctantly or under compulsion”.
 - 1. Paul goes on with the encouraging words, “And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all

sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.” (2 **Corinthians 9:8**, NKJV)

- c. There is a priority regarding who we give to.
 - i. First priority is to take care of our parents, grandparents, and other family members.
 - 1. “But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” (1 **Timothy 5:8**, NKJV)
 - a. What a terrible curse! It says those Christians who do not provide for their own families are *worse than unbelievers!*
 - 2. “If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve them, and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve those who are really widows.” (1 **Timothy 5:16**, NKJV)
 - 3. Jesus taught the same thing in **Matthew 15:1-20** and **Mark 7:1-23**, that providing for one’s parents is one way we fulfill the command to “honor your father and mother” (from the Ten Commandments, in **Exodus 20:12** and **Deuteronomy 5:16**).
 - a. Jesus is blasting those who are trying to avoid this responsibility toward their elderly parents who are in need.
 - ii. Second priority is to take care of other Christians.
 - 1. “Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches. Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.” (**Galatians 6:6-10**, NKJV)
 - 2. Paul calls us to do good to all, *but especially to our fellow Christians.*
 - 3. He also says we are to provide for those who teach God’s Word.
 - a. Personal disclosure: for several years I (Chuck) have been supporting myself and my family by working as an engineer, so have not needed any support from others.

However, this is something the Bible teaches for those who teach, but do not have other means to provide for themselves.

- iii. Yet, there is a *third group* we are also called to care for: those *outside* our physical and spiritual families.
 - 1. In **Luke 10**, Jesus points a lawyer to the example of the Good Samaritan, who took care of a stranger, someone from a different race and religion.
 - 2. Jesus used this parable to explain how we are to fulfill the second greatest commandment: to “love your neighbor as yourself”. (**Leviticus 19:18**)
- d. Do not support lazy people.
 - i. Paul commanded the rich to be generous; and he talked about what genuine love is, that it includes caring for others. But look *what else* Paul says, in **2 Thessalonians**.
 - ii. Read **2 Thessalonians 3:6-12**
 - 1. Paul calls those who do not work “disorderly”. He says that if someone refuses to work, *we should not give them food*.
 - 2. **Question:** Is this direction *unloving*?
 - a. **Answer:** No. We should not enable sinners to continue in their sin, nor should we block them from experiencing the pain that could lead them to life-saving repentance.
 - b. Do not support someone’s sinful lifestyle (laziness).
 - 3. Same principle for those who over-consume, and spend everything they have foolishly (today, often even more than what they have, going into debt to support a lifestyle they cannot afford).
 - a. “There is desirable treasure, and oil in the dwelling of the wise, but a foolish man squanders it.” (**Proverbs 21:20, NKJV**)
 - iii. **Question:** How can we tell if someone is truly in need, versus someone who is lazy?
 - 1. Pray for wisdom; it’s not always clear.

2. We must be careful about our own hearts. We don't want our own greed and selfishness to block clear and objective understanding of who we need to assist.
- e. There is a special relationship between the giver of alms and those who receive. This involves a wonderful blessing to the giver, and a responsibility to those receiving financial help.
- i. Early Christians like Clement of Alexandria (learned teacher of Christians in Alexandria, Egypt, c. 150-215 AD) saw this principle contained in Jesus' teaching, "And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home." (**Luke 16:9**, NKJV)
 1. Note that some manuscripts have the last phrase as, "when it (referring back to the money) fails" instead of "when you fail". However, the practical application that follows applies just same, either way.
 2. "Unrighteous mammon" refers to money.
 - ii. Clement urged Christians who had means to use their wealth to help the poor, and in the process to gather for themselves an army of prayer warriors. This is a spiritual army of men and women who, although poor, could help them achieve salvation.
 1. "Unlike the armies of other men, you should collect for yourself an unarmed, peaceful, bloodless, restrained army: one of pious old men, orphans dear to God, widows armed with meekness, and men adorned with love. Use your money to gather these guards of your body and soul. For their sake, a sinking ship is buoyed, steered by the prayers of the saints alone. Disease at its height is put to flight by the laying on of hands. The attack of robbers is spoiled by righteous prayers. And the might of demons is crushed, vanquished by strenuous commands.
 2. "All of these warriors and guards are trusty. None of them are idle. Not one of them is useless. For one of them can obtain pardon from God for you. Another can comfort you when you're sick. One can weep and groan in sympathy for you to the Lord of all. Another can teach you some of the things that are useful for salvation. One can admonish you with confidence. Another can counsel you with kindness. And all of them can love you truly, without cunning, without fear, without hypocrisy, without flattery, without pretense. What sweet service comments from loving souls!"

- a. (Source: *Intimacy with God*, a translation of the writings of Clement of Alexandria into contemporary English, chapter 7; Scroll Publishing.)
 - b. (Also found in Clement of Alexandria, *Who is the Rich Man that Shall Be Saved*, chapters 34-35; in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 2, p. 601)
- f. The true, underlying spiritual contrast is *not* about being rich vs. being poor. Instead, it's about our *attitude toward* money and wealth. As Clement of Alexandria pointed out in "*Who is the Rich Man that Shall Be Saved*" (found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 2, pp. 591-604):
- i. There are many poor people who are greedy.
 - ii. There are many rich people who are generous.
 - iii. There are even some who have given their wealth away, but later regret it and are filled with remorse!
 - iv. The goal: don't love money! Do not be attached to wealth; be wise and generous. Put into practice loving others *as we love ourselves!*
 - v. The sin of Judas, the love of money, has disqualified many from salvation. Let's take a deep look into our own hearts, and deal with our greed. Let us strive to have the righteousness that Jesus expects regarding our use of wealth and showing love to our neighbors.