Jesus and Judas
Luke 22:1-6

Now, I don't know how the summer was for you, but for us British – we've had a great summer. First there was the Queen's jubilee, and then there was Bradley Wiggins winning the Tour de France, and then came the Olympics – where Team GB won more medals than the Germans, which always go down well, and more medals than the French, which goes down even better, but best of all, 4 times as many Gold medals as the Australians – which just goes to show what can happen when you send all your convicts to the other side of the world. And, let's be honest, if the games had gone on just a few days longer, I have no doubt that we would have overtaken the Americans as well.

But in all the post games euphoria, something caught my eye, and that was to do with football. Not American football, with all that padding, but soccer. Because, as the Olympics finished, and the football season started, commentators in the press have drawn some fairly stark comparisons between the behavior and the approachability of the Olympic medal winners on the one hand, and English premier league footballers on the other, and between the behavior of crowds in the stadiums at the Olympics which was great apparently, and that of the crowds standing on the football terraces who frequently hurl abuse at each other and at the players. And that's a comparison that has led the manager of the English football team to say that it's a wake up call for football.

But in reading all that discussion, one image struck me. A journalist writing this up juxtaposed two images, the first was of an Olympic crowd, waving their flags and cheering on the competitors. But the second was this image, of a crowd in a football stadium signaling their disapproval – to put it mildly - of a player who joined another team.

Judas. That's a powerful word isn't it? To call someone, to accuse someone of being a 'Judas', is strong, it's cutting. So why has that name Judas become a bye-word for betrayal and treachery?

Well, we're going to see why this morning.

Luke 22:1-6

So we are now in the end game. Jesus has journeyed from Galilee to Jerusalem and as He's travelled He's been preparing the disciples for His departure. And that time is now fast approaching. As one commentator (Bock) says, 'the moment of truth has come', the moment when people are going to have to lay their cards on the table of where they stand with Jesus. Jesus has finished his teaching in the temple and from here on out there is the relentless progress to the cross.

But by now Jerusalem is packed with pilgrims. Luke tells us it's Passover time – so the moon would be full in the night skies above and below the streets would be full of men and women and children as they've journeyed from across Israel to celebrate the feast, to celebrate God delivering Israel from slavery in Egypt. They've come to Jerusalem to rejoice in God rescuing the firstborn of Israel from death as the angel of the Lord passed over their houses with the blood of the Passover lamb painted on their door frames. And the firstborn of Egypt died and the firstborn of Israel survived. And not only that, but by the time of Jesus, the

Passover feast didn't just look back, it also looked longingly forward to the future deliverance of Israel from her enemies, when Messiah comes.

But Luke sets up a stark contrast here as well: whilst the people have come to party and to celebrate, the religious leaders have gathered to plot and to scheme. Whilst the people are celebrating life and liberty, the chief priests and the scribes are scheming death and destruction. They have made their decision: Jesus must be liquidated. They want the earth rid of Him.

And yet, they have a problem. They want to put Jesus to death, but there are all these crowds filling Jerusalem. And they know perfectly well how popular Jesus is with the masses – He's been travelling through their villages, He's been teaching in their market places, He's been showing them grace, He's been declaring their sins forgiven, He's healed their sick, He's cleansed their lepers, He's raised their dead. Sure these leaders have a problem – how can they arrest and execute Jesus without having the crowd turn on them?

But standing behind these Chief Priests, overshadowing even their scheming is a far darker, far more malevolent power. V3: 'Then Satan…' Satan, whose name means 'the accuser', 'the adversary', has been silent and absent from Luke's gospel since chapter four. The last we saw of him was when he tried and failed to bring Jesus down in his temptations in the wilderness. And at the end of those Luke told us in 4:13, satan 'departed from him until an opportune time.' But since then he has been on the defensive. All the time since Jesus has been preaching the kingdom, and proclaiming freedom to captives, and casting out demons, and waging war against the kingdom of darkness, and satan has been on the back foot.

Well, satan's opportune time has come. Now he launches his counter mission, now he makes his move. And all that follows from now to the cross - betrayal and arrest and trial and death - is just the visible, surface battle of the invisible cosmic war that satan has unleashed against Jesus.

But what if you don't believe in satan? What if you're not yet a Christian, or maybe you are a Christian, but you read this stuff about satan and demons and think, ah that's a bit primitive – we know better than to believe that kind of stuff nowadays. Well, firstly of course, the Bible doesn't try to *explain* the powers of darkness, it just presents them as a given at work in the world; and if you're thoughtful enough, you don't have to observe the world-scene for long before you begin to ponder what exactly *is* behind the madness and the evil we see? And then the picture the bible presents doesn't seem so first century after all – suddenly it seems remarkably twenty-first century. But secondly, if you're not persuaded by this, think about it - if there was a satan, if there were such things as powers of darkness who want to rob you of all that God has for you, wouldn't a particularly useful weapon in their armoury be to try and convince you they *didn't* exist, and then work their malign influence but all the time staying below your radar? Isn't that what every infiltrating enemy wants? To make the other side think they aren't there.

In CS Lewis' wonderful book, the Screwtape Letters, an older more cunning demon, Uncle Screwtape, writes to his younger more naïve nephew, Wormwood, advising him how to tempt the human he's been assigned to. Here's what he says: "My dear Wormwood, I wonder you should ask me whether it is essential to keep the patient in ignorance of your own existence. That question, at least for the present phase of the struggle has been answered for us by the High Command. Our policy, for the moment, is to conceal ourselves. . . . We are really faced with a cruel dilemma. When the humans disbelieve in our existence we lose all the pleasing results of direct terrorism and we make no magicians. On the other hand, when they believe in us, we cannot make them materialists and skeptics... I do not think you will have much difficulty in keeping the patient in the dark. The fact that 'devils' are predominantly *comic* figures in the modern imagination will help you. If any faint suspicion of your existence begins to arise in his mind, suggest to him a picture of something in red tights, and persuade him that since he cannot believe in that (it is an old textbook method of confusing them) he therefore cannot believe in you." (p31-2).

And there's the tactic – make them skeptics, let them think its all mythology, conceal yourself, and the battle is half-won.

Well, Luke tells us that satan seizes the moment – he senses his opportunity to take Jesus out. But how does he do it? Because he doesn't do it with spooks and ghosts and goblins and things that go bump in the night, does he? He does it through a man, and that man was Judas Iscariot.

V3-4: Then Satan entered into Judas Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve. He went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray him to them.

And so Judas gives the religious leaders what they could barely have dreamt of: the ultimate inside job. Now they have an embedded spy. Now they can know Jesus' whereabouts, so they can take him when no one else is around; now they know what he says in private, so they will have all the evidence they need. And perhaps best of all, if necessary, they can shift the blame onto Judas – 'we were only going on the evidence and the intelligence of this man.' No wonder Luke tells us in v5 that 'they were glad, and agreed to give him money.'

But why would Judas do it? Why would one of Jesus' closest men, one of the 12, betray him? Well, for the rest of our time, we're going to take a closer look at this man Judas.

Judas – a study in betrayal

Whenever the twelve disciples are listed in the gospels one of them is always mentioned last – would you like to hazard a guess who that might be? Judas – 'and Judas Iscariot who betrayed him.' 'And Judas Iscariot who became a traitor.' And yet none of the gospel writers vilify him. They never mock him, as if we are so much better than him – rather, Judas is presented as a man you and I need to learn from. He's presented to us as a sober example, that it is possible to be thought of, and to all intents and purposes appear to be an insider, but still be an outsider. It is possible to be invited by Jesus to come and join up, to get involved

in ministry, to spend three years living and eating and drinking with the Son of God, it's possible to preach and teach others, even to be the church treasurer – which, as we'll see, Judas was, and still walk away from Jesus. You see, like Judas you can hang out with Jesus but not love him. You can mix with and do all the stuff that the other disciples did, all the stuff that Christians do – you can know the right people, do the right things, and Jesus still not have your heart.

And Judas serves as this warning, that association with Jesus, or with his people – the church, is not the same is being Jesus' friend. Because, maybe, like Judas, you're just waiting for a better offer to come along.

But that still doesn't answer the question, why? Sure, all the other disciples abandoned Jesus – the gospels are wonderfully transparent and honest about that – it's just one of the reasons why you can trust them. And Peter denied Jesus. But only Judas betrayed him. Why?

When I was a medic, when something went wrong, a nurse or a doctor administered the wrong drug, or a procedure was done incorrectly, or a wrong diagnosis was made, we would frequently spend hours going over the details: could this have been prevented, could we have seen this coming? Of course, the trick is to do that before the event happens, but still you can learn something in retrospect.

So, what about Judas? Was this predictable? From what we know of him, could we have seen this coming? Well, the gospels don't go into detail, but they tell us enough to know that Judas opened his heart sufficiently for the powers of darkness to get a foot-hold.

Opening the door

The other three gospels relate a story that Luke chooses to leave out, and it happens just before Judas makes his fateful decision.

Matthew 26:3-9: 'Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, and plotted together in order to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him. But they said, "Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people." Now when Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came up to him with an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment, and she poured it on his head as he reclined at table. And when the disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, "Why this waste? For this could have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor."

But John fills in another bit of the detail: that it was Judas who started the complaining, and having told us that he writes, 'He said this [about the money being wasted on Jesus], not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it.' (John 12:6).

So that's the first clue to why. Judas considered this expensive ointment poured out on Jesus a waste. Jesus wasn't worth that much. And on top of that – if that ointment had been sold, and the money put in the moneybag, it could have come

Judas' way. He was already dipping his hand in the purse. So, at least in part, what lies behind Judas' betrayal was this desire for more, this desire for money, covetousness. If he had betrayed Jesus for some high-minded political ideal he could have done so for free. But he doesn't, he sells out on Jesus for money. And Matthew tells us that it was Judas who initiated the discussion with the leaders on money: Matt 26:15, 'What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?' That's Judas' question – arguably it was always Judas' question – 'what can I get out of this?' It's the mindset of the self-centred getter. And as soon as Jesus stopped delivering what Judas wanted – he would look elsewhere. It's why time and again the bible warns us against the love of money. As Paul says in 1 Timothy 6:9, 'Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmless desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.' And frankly, Paul could have been thinking of Judas when he wrote that. Simply put, Judas loved something else more than Jesus – money.

The second clue we get from the episode of the woman anointing Jesus is deceit. Judas doesn't think Jesus is worth the waste, and he wants the money for himself, but he cloaks it all in religious language – 'this could have been sold and the money given to the poor'. But he doesn't care about the poor – just himself. You see, Judas is already in the habit of trying to deceive others – and maybe even himself. He said one thing, but lived another. Judas was living a double life long before the fateful night he agreed to betray Jesus. And that's the danger of thinking we can sin in secret and in private and that not eventually catch up on us.

But the third clue as to why he did what he did comes with Jesus rebuke of those rebuking the woman wasting her ointment on him. Matthew 26:10-12: "Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me. For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. In pouring this ointment on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial."

And just maybe at the moment the penny dropped for Judas, because the next thing he does is betray him. Just maybe it dawns on him, that Jesus isn't who he hoped he would be. He isn't going to lead the revolution he wants, he isn't going to be some great conquering hero. He really is serious about going to his death. And Judas takes offence at that – that's not the kind of cause he wants to give his time and effort to. Things aren't working out the way he wants, Jesus isn't coming up with the goods, so he gets disillusioned with Jesus and in his heart, he's gone.

So the seeds were there, the flaws in his character were there: covetousness and wanting money more than Jesus; deceitfulness and living a double life; and finally, disillusionment with Jesus. And because sins tend to grow, and trajectories tend to be followed – those fault-lines were enough for satan to put in a wedge and keep tapping away until he broke him. Judas had opened the door to the unthinkable, and he turned his back on Jesus.

So how can we ensure we don't follow in Judas' footsteps?

Treading a different path

1. **Treasure Jesus above everything:** The hard truth is that Judas loved money more than Jesus, and he betrayed Him for it. Now whether it's money or the stuff money can buy, or career, or family, or boyfriend or girlfriend or whatever, when we treasure anything above Jesus, the door to potential betrayal stands open. But you can shut it firmly by treasuring Him above everything – by meditating on all that He has done for you, by contemplating where you would be now and in eternity without Him, by having your heart warmed again by the immensity of His love for you, by realizing afresh that in comparison to Christ and His glory and all eternity, to value anything else above Him is just crazy.

2. **Deal with sin early.** Judas didn't just wake up one morning and find himself a traitor. He was on a trajectory that led him there. So when you come face to face with your sin, face it, don't duck responsibility, don't try and shift the blame, don't excuse it, don't tolerate it, repent of it. Turn from it. Deal with it by bringing it into the open and to the cross.

3. **Don't take offence at Jesus.** You know, one high risk time for turning away from Jesus is when things don't work out the way you wanted, and like Judas you can become disillusioned by Jesus and you take offence at God. When you sense that happening, throw yourself back on Jesus and trust Him. Tell Him you don't understand what is happening, but you know He is good, and you trust Him that His purposes are good, and you would rather lose everything than lose Him. Don't be passive in that moment – fight it by trusting.

4. **Put on the armour of God.** As Judas discovered too late, we're in a cosmic battle, and if you are being faithful to Jesus, you will face attack. But when you do, remember, you are never safer than when you are walking in obedience to His will, and never more at risk when you're not. So, as Paul says in Ephesians 6 'Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints.'

Finally, 5. **Don't wander off.** Don't go Absent Without Leave. When Judas finally betrays Jesus he slinks off into the night alone, leaving the other disciples in the upper room. He goes AWOL. But just as a soldier needs his comrades, so we need one another - to point out those fault-lines we don't see, but make us vulnerable; and to encourage one another when the battle's raging and we feel like quitting. It's not for no reason that Hebrews says (10:24-5) 'Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day

drawing near.' And so if you're not in one of our homegroups, or students group – let me urge you to get in one, and live this out.

So, Judas is here as an example, not to vilify, but to learn from. So that by treading a different path, instead of betraying Jesus, we can spend our lives living for His eternal praise and glory.