

Skipping Easter Luke 23:26-24:49

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There's a story that's been a part of many major motion pictures beginning with "*The King of Kings*" in 1927, "The Greatest Story Ever Told" in 1965, "*Jesus Christ Superstar*" in 1973, "*The Passion of the Christ*" in 2004, and "*Mary Magdalene*" in 2018, for a few. Now, I'm not forgetting "*The Chosen*," but it hasn't gotten to this part yet.

This is the story of what happened to a man named Judas Iscariot when he decided to skip Easter.

Not just any Easter, but the very first Easter. The Easter Sunday to which all Easter Sundays look back.

Now, Judas had been a faithful follower of Jesus for several years. He'd been one of the select few specifically chosen by Jesus Himself to be a part of His inner circle, one of the twelve disciples, an Apostle.

For three years, Judas traveled with Jesus. He was trained and taught by Him in preparation for his role as one of the leaders, one of the pillars of the future church.

Everything seemed to be going well, but as in all great dramas, something went tragically wrong.

Judas inexplicably turned on his friend and partnered with a conspiracy of Jewish leaders, betraying Jesus to His death at the hands of Roman executioners.

But why? Why did Judas do it? This question has been asked for over 2,000 years. Why did Judas turn on Jesus? Let's look at some viable reasons...

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The name Iscariot is a combination of two Hebrew words – Ish and Kariot, which literally mean Man of Kerioth.

If so, that means Judas was the only non-Galilean among the disciples. Perhaps, because of this, he was considered to be an outsider by the rest of the disciples.

Do you know what it feels like to be an outsider? What those feelings can do to a person and what terrible things it can drive them to do?

If not, just look at what's happening in our nation today with all the mass shootings. Perhaps the same thing that drove those gunmen to do such crazy acts also drove Judas to betray Jesus.

Maybe, when Judas learned there was a Jewish plot to assassinate Jesus, he panicked; betraying His friend in order to save his own skin. Maybe it was that simple: a desire for self-preservation.

Another possibility could be that it was just good, old-fashioned greed. We know that he was greedy because the Bible tells us that.

John tells us that, as Jesus' treasurer, Judas used to cook the books and pocket some of the money when he thought no one was looking.

I've also heard people ask why Judas would betray Jesus for only thirty pieces of silver.

Well, according to my research, those thirty pieces of silver would've been worth around \$10,000 in today's money. People have killed for far less.

Maybe Judas came to hate Christ because Jesus could look straight into his heart and see him for who he really was, while others saw him as someone who was somebody.

An elite follower of Christ. The one trusted with the finances. But every time Jesus looked at him, Judas could see the disappointment in His eyes sensing Jesus saw a thief and a traitor.

Some commentators believe that Iscariot wasn't a derivative of Hebrew, but had its origin in Greek. If so, his name would've meant "*Dagger Bearer.*"

The *Dagger Bearers* were an elite group of violent Jewish nationalists who would do anything, even assassination, in order to see Israel freed from Roman control.

Perhaps he thought he saw in Jesus the makings of a political Savior, One who would unite the people and overthrow the Romans.

Maybe, when it became apparent that Jesus had no such ambitions, Judas grew disappointed and disillusioned and betrayed him in disgust.

On the other hand, it's possible that Judas never intended for Jesus to die that day.

When he realized that Jesus had no intention of using His supernatural powers to deliver the Jews from Roman rule, he was just trying to force His hand.

Judas may well have believed that when they came to arrest Jesus that He would call upon 10,000 angels to destroy the Romans and set Him free.

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So, why did Judas betray Jesus? We may never know, but one thing of which we can be sure is that the consequences were devastating, disastrous, and deadly.

I'm not talking about the consequences for Jesus, but the consequences for Judas.

When Judas realized that Jesus wasn't going to call on those 10,000 angels, but that He was going to allow Himself to be tried and tortured it was more that he could bear, he just broke.

Matthew tells us what happened to Judas in Matthew 27:3-5, *"When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. "I have sinned," he said, "for I have betrayed innocent blood." "What is that to us?" they replied. "That's your responsibility." So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself."*

Judas' betrayal of Jesus was not the end of Christ, it was the end of Judas. While the story of Judas came to a premature end, the story of Jesus went on, but Judas missed it.

So, what did Judas miss because he took the 'easy' way out? In Luke's account we see at least four significant things that Judas missed when he tragically chose to skip Easter.

Granted he didn't realize that he was skipping Easter because he didn't know that Easter was coming in only three short days.

Had he known, maybe he would've waited. Maybe he would've hung on a little bit longer, and maybe the outcome would've been gloriously different, but he didn't.

So, let me just say here that, if you're feeling you're at the end of your rope and feel like throwing in the towel, don't!

With God, things can change unexpectedly and dramatically for the good. Your situation might seem hopeless, but Jesus specializes in hopeless cases.

In fact, when we reject our heavenly Father's gift of Easter, we're missing out on more than we might think.

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Let's look at what Judas missed out on when he skipped Easter. What all, who skip Easter, even today, miss out on.

First, Judas missed out on a pardon from Christ. After Jesus was betrayed, He was arrested and tried on trumped up charges with several witnesses committing perjury in order to have Him convicted.

The Jews found Him guilty of blasphemy, turned Him over to Pilate who in turn sentenced Him to be crucified after having Him flogged to within an inch of His life.

After flogging Him, the soldiers put a purple (the color of royalty) robe on Him, placed a crown of thorns on His head, and then mocked Him saying, "*All hail the king of the Jews.*"

Then they strapped the cross beam to His back and led Him away to Golgotha or "*The Place of the Skull*" where they nailed Him to the cross with spikes through His wrists and feet.

After they had done all of this, Jesus looked down on them from the cross and said in Luke 23:34, "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*"

People have held life-long grudges toward others for far less than all that. Yet here, Jesus graciously offered pardon to those who were undeniable guilty of the most monstrous criminal act in all human history.

This just goes to show that Jesus literally lived and died by His teachings.

Luke 6:27-28, *“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.”*

It’s one thing to talk the talk, but here we see Jesus walking the walk under the most difficult circumstances imaginable.

We also see that Judas wasn’t the only one to blame for what happened to Jesus, not that it lessens his guilt.

But if Jesus could forgive the members of the Sanhedrin who conspired against Him and...

- If He could forgive the false witnesses who lied about Him
- If He could forgive Pilate who was too spineless to uphold the law and...
- If He could forgive the soldiers who murdered Him...

Then He certainly could’ve forgiven Judas who betrayed Him. But Judas skipped Easter and missed out on the pardon of Christ.

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Next, we see that Judas missed out on the peace of Christ because the peace of Christ was coming on Easter Sunday.

Judas may have taken his own life because he was so tormented in his soul over *“betraying innocent blood”* that he couldn’t stand it or himself any longer. He needed the peace of Christ.

Luke described this peace when the disciples had gathered together in Luke 24.

Luke 24:36-38, *“As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, “Peace to you!” But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. And he said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?”*

Indeed, why be troubled since Jesus had returned from the dead and had brought the gift of peace of mind and soul with Him?

If only Judas hadn't skipped Easter, his pressure could've been replaced with Christ's peace.

Judas would've known that this peace was coming if he also hadn't skipped out on another key event, the Passover meal.

Jesus celebrated Passover with his disciples, including Judas, in what we now refer to as *The Last Supper*.

During this meal Jesus prophesied that one of the Twelve would betray Him at which time Judas left the meal to do just that.

Shortly after Judas left, Jesus told his disciples in John 14:27, *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”*

Jesus made it plain that He wasn't offering a worldly kind of peace that one has when all's well, but a spiritual, supernatural peace that one has even in the midst of testing and trying times.

This was the peace that Judas needed so desperately and it's the same peace that people living in our world need today.

Many of you may be going through difficult times: family problems, financial problems, physical problems, psychological problems, problems at home, or problems at work.

Not to mention all the problems that we read about in the newspaper or hear about on the news.

Jesus never promised to preserve us from problems, but He did promise to provide peace in the midst of our problems.

Don't make the same mistake Judas did. Don't skip out on Easter and miss out on Jesus' provision of peace.

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Then we see that Judas missed out on the power of Christ. Today, when almost anything of significance happens, it seems that there's always a reporter there, covering the story for a news outlet.

If the arrest of Jesus had taken place in modern times one would assume that there would've been a number of reporters on hand.

You've seen how they act. They'd probably be shoving their microphones in Judas' face and asking the million dollar question, *"Why, Judas? Why did you betray your mentor? What did you hope to get from it? What were you seeking?"*

I suspect the one thing that Judas had craved all his life, but never had, was power.

He was a nationalist and as such he craved the political and military power to overthrow the Roman occupation of the Holy Land and liberate his people.

He longed for the power to make a difference in this world. He longed for the power to change the status quo, the power to do good.

But in the end, by doing things his own way, the only power he found was the power to take his own life and by so doing he missed out on a power that was far greater than anything he could ever have imagined.

Shortly, before Jesus ascended back into heaven, He came to His disciples in Luke 24:49 saying, *“And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”*

You see, those who “stayed” got the power, but Judas skipped out on Easter.

It may not have been the kind of power he was expecting, but it was a power so great that eventually even their enemies would recognize that they had *“turned the world upside down.”*

All Judas wanted was the power to change the political scene in a tiny little country in the Middle East, but the disciples received the power to change the whole world.

The Greek word that Jesus used for power, *dunamos*, is the same word from which we get our English words like dynamic, dynamo, and dynamite.

This was a dynamic and explosive spiritual force that was unleashed on the world through the faithful followers of Christ.

It was the power to preach and see sinners convicted and souls saved. It was the power to pray and see the sick healed, the lame walk, and the dead rise.

It was the power to change the entire world, one life at a time. It was a power whose life-changing properties haven't been diminished even by the passing of more than 2,000 years of history.

Kings have come and gone, empires have risen and fallen, but the power of Jesus is just as potent today as it was on the day of Pentecost, but Judas missed it.

It's important for us to realize that this power wasn't just made available to those first disciples but is available to all Jesus' disciples -- even today.

Paul wanted us to understand this when he wrote Ephesians 1:19-20, *"I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms."*

The very same power that raised Christ from the dead is accessible today *"for us who believe [in] him."*

It's the power to keep on keeping on despite our problems and pain. It's the power to live a life of holiness, a life of noble character, a life of integrity when it would be much easier to cut corners like everyone else seems to be doing.

It's the power to resist sin and temptation. It's the power to do the right thing in the right way and for the right reasons.

It's the power to love the unlovable and forgive the unforgivable. It's all the power you'll ever need for every situation you'll ever face. So don't miss out on it like Judas did.

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Lastly, Judas missed out on paradise with Christ. The Bible tells us that Jesus wasn't the only one to be executed that day. In addition to Jesus, two criminals were crucified as well.

Luke tells us that, while they hung on their crosses dying, the following verbal exchange took place:

Luke 23:39-43, "One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

This promise could just as easily have been given to Judas, if only he hadn't skipped Easter. These were hardened criminals who, quite frankly, were getting exactly what they deserved.

Regardless of how you may feel about the death penalty, these criminals committed a crime and were being punished as the law required.

Yet, to the criminal who was repentant, Jesus promised that he would be with Him in paradise that very same day.

The point is that this criminal wasn't any more innocent than Judas. Therefore, if this criminal could get to go to paradise, then so could've Judas had he not skipped Easter.

This also means that if those men were candidates for paradise, then so are we, if only we'll follow the example of the penitent criminal.

No matter what we've done, no matter how bad it was, and no matter how many times we've done it, if we're willing to repent of our sins and look to Jesus in faith, then we can experience the pardon of Christ and look forward to experiencing paradise with Him for all eternity.

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Conclusion

The November 12, 2001, issue of *Sports Illustrated* covered the baseball World Series in which the Arizona Diamondbacks came back to beat the New York Yankees in the last inning of the last game.

That great comeback got the editors thinking about other great comebacks in history and so they put together a top ten list of the greatest comebacks of all time.

It was a list that was broader than just sports. Elvis Presley made the list as a result of a TV special in 1968 that revived his sagging career.

Muhammad Ali made the list for his comeback from a seven-year forced exile from boxing to once again become the undisputed heavy weight champion of the world.

Harry Truman was listed because of his 1948 victory over Thomas Dewey when all of the polls had shown him trailing significantly.

Michael Jordan made the list when he went from baseball back to basketball and won another three championships.

Humanity itself made the top ten list for its comeback from the Black Plague which killed 25 million Europeans in the 14th century.

Number two among the all-time comebacks was a tie between Germany and Japan for coming back from being devastated by World War II to become economic powers within only a generation.

But... the number one greatest comeback of all time according to the editors of *Sports Illustrated* – Jesus Christ.

Now I don't know if one of the editors was a Christian who was trying to make a point or if Jesus' listing was purely in jest, but regardless of the editors' motivations they certainly got that one right.

Jesus' comeback from death was the greatest comeback of all time. Unlike all the other comebacks that made the top ten list, this is one comeback that we can get in on as well.

In Romans 6:5, Paul said, *“For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his.”*

That's what Judas missed out on when he skipped Easter. He missed out on Christ's comeback and therefore he missed out on his own comeback.

Judas' comeback story would've been one of the greatest comeback stories in all scripture.

He would've been right up there with Moses who committed murder and fled from Egypt in fear only to comeback and lead the Israelites out of slavery.

He would have been up there with Peter who denied, with oaths and curses, that he ever knew Jesus only to comeback and become the pillar and leader of the early church.

Just imagine what Judas' comeback story could've been. He could've written scripture, planted churches, performed miracles, but he missed out on all of that.

So, this is the sum of it: Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ on that first Easter morning we have the promise of pardon for our past sins, peace and power for our present living, and paradise for our future.

Whatever you may do this Easter Sunday, don't make the same mistake that Judas did. Don't skip Easter and miss out on the offer, the comeback of a lifetime.

You see, Jesus died on the cross in order to pay the penalty for sins committed, but not for His sins, as He was sinless. He died to pay for the sins of the world – your sins and mine.

He did this so we wouldn't have to get what we deserve. That's called grace or unmerited favor.

We can't do anything to deserve it, but by the grace of God, which we access through faith, we receive the forgiveness of sins.

That's what Easter is all about. Don't miss out on it!