

1-7-17

"The Worst Person Ever"

Katie is an English major and a writer, and she will have me read some of her stuff and ask questions. And one question she will ask is "In regards to this character, Did you have a feeling of judgement or sympathy towards them?" And I find that my responses are almost always completely one way or the other. But the best characters are when it is mixed. Because characters should be complex. They shouldn't be completely one way or another. Why? Because people in real life are the same way!!! But we so frequently jump to conclusions about people. Everything is black or white. Someone was completely wrong and another person was completely right. But that's not how it is.

So as we are talking about "The Worst" this morning, I would like to take a look at the worst person ever in history. At least one of the worst. This person has been known as one of the worst for thousands of years. And that person, is Judas.

Who was Judas? Judas was one of the 12 disciples. 12 men who were handpicked by Jesus. These 12 men spent 3 years with Jesus. Going wherever he went. Hearing everything he taught to the crowds of people. Sometimes having Jesus speak just to them and no one else. Seeing all the miracles Jesus did. If there was anyone who had a front row seat to Jesus' work on earth, it was the disciples. And Judas was one of the 12.

The thing is, in history, Judas is not known primarily as a follower of Jesus. The first thing mentioned about him isn't the fact that he was one of Jesus' 12 disciples. What he is known for, is betraying Jesus. It is so famously known, that if someone stabs someone in the back today, they may be called "Judas." If you ask someone for a list of the worst people in history, Judas will be near the top. I don't know about you, but I've never

known anyone in recent history named Judas. Who would want to name their child after someone who backstabbed God?

I want us to dive deeper into this person who many might call the worst ever. And then we are going to compare him to some other people, and see what the differences are.

I don't know what you may know about the Bible, so if you've heard this before, hang with me, and eventually hopefully you will hear something you haven't heard before...

First, a little history. Jesus was going around preaching, teaching, and healing a ton of people. He was actually gaining quite a following. The people were starting to view Him as a Messiah, that is, someone who would save the people. The question to ask is, what do they need saving from?

At that time, Rome was in power. Wherever Romans went, they conquered. They came, they saw, they conquered. They were in Israel, and they were in power. The Jews clearly were not a fan of this. They wanted a King of their own, from their own people.

In steps Jesus. He does great miracles. He teaches with great wisdom. He speaks with authority. AND... He says that the Kingdom of God is near. YES! This is what the people want! A leader to take down the Romans! To put Israel back to the splendor of the Middle East. To have the supernatural power that causes all other nations to fear Israel. Jesus must be the one to lead them on. He does great miracles, speaks with authority and truth. He will be the one to deliver the people from under the iron fist of Roman rule.

Many people thought that Jesus would lead the Jews to overthrow the Roman government, and be the next King of Israel. Some of the disciples thought the same thing. The problem is, Jesus was moving kinda slow. He had great power.

He had authority from God. He was even claiming to be the Son of God. Why wouldn't He just overthrow the Roman government and put Israel back on top where it belonged?

Which is where we come to Judas. You see, Judas thought that Jesus needed a push. Sometimes, when it comes to a war starting, people are anxious about taking the first shot. They are hesitant to throw the first punch. But once things start, both sides jump in. Judas could see a war brewing. He knew that the Jewish leaders were not happy with Jesus, because Jesus kept calling them out. But whenever push came to shove, Jesus escaped the scene, and went somewhere else to preach, teach, and heal. If only Judas could get Jesus in a face to face confrontation with them...

So Judas goes to the Pharisees (the pastors of the day, the Jewish leaders), and tells them that Jesus is out of control, and He needs to be stopped. "Great!" say the Pharisees. "We know this! But we have no idea where He is, and we can't really get Him when He is surrounded by a crowd." "Don't worry," Judas says, "I'll lead you to Him at a time when you can get Him." And Judas makes the deal for 30 pieces of silver! SWEEEEET! Jesus is gonna have a face to face with the leaders and the tables are gonna be turned and He is gonna show them who is boss, AND Judas gets a little money out of the deal, too! Oh man, Jesus didn't come up with this idea, but when He is seated on the throne, I bet He is gonna have special place in the palace for him. Maybe even be the right hand man of Jesus the new king!

Except, they come to arrest Jesus, and Jesus lets himself get arrested. Peter, one of the other disciples actually cut off one of the ears of the guards arresting Jesus, and Jesus healed the dude! That didn't stop the guards from arresting him though. And they hit him multiple times. In the face!!! Jesus talked about this whole "turn the other cheek" thing when people hit you, but gee-whiz! He's literally letting them hit Him in the face!

Ok, ok, maybe Jesus is acting and saving it for when He gets in front of the leadership.

Except Jesus isn't acting. They question His claims. "The only one who can cast out demons is the one in charge of the demons, which makes YOU a demon!" "You continue to heal people on the Sabbath. The Sabbath is a holy day of rest, which means you aren't supposed to work, and healing people is work, so you are breaking the laws of God!"

And Jesus doesn't say a thing. He just takes it. And in between these accusations, they spit on Him, mock Him, and hit Him some more! They finally question his authority and Godship. And He speaks! And continues to make the claim that He is the Son of God... Which is blasphemy!!! How dare He make such claims!! They hit Him some more and lead Him away. They have to wait to take Him before the Roman courts, because they do not have the authority to carry out the death penalty.

Judas realizes he has made a big mistake. For some reason, Jesus isn't defending Himself. The first shot has been fired. The first punch has been thrown, literally! And it's landed. Multiple times! And He's not fighting back. He's not calling down angels or hurling lightning bolts. He certainly can! He has that ability! But he doesn't. Judas goes back to the Jewish leaders and tries to return the money. His conscience is ridden with guilt. He has betrayed the Son of God, who in less than 12 hours would be beaten within an inch of his life, mocked, nailed to a cross, and die. All because of him. All because of Judas.

So he goes back to the chief priests and says, "I have done wrong! Innocent blood is on my hands! Take back this money!" But the chief priests say, "What is that to us? It sounds like your problem, not ours." Wracked with guilt, Judas throws the money at them, runs out, and hangs himself. And so ends the life of the betrayer of God.

I kind of feel bad for Judas. I mean, he was only trying to do what he thought was best. I mean, how many times has someone tried to do what they thought was best and it turn out to be the worst possible thing they could do? Well, I did a little perusing through the Bible and found out that there were actually many, many times that people thought they knew what was best and it turned out to be bad.

Example 1 – Adam and Eve. God told Adam and Eve not to eat from a certain tree. You can eat from any tree you want except THAT one. It is the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. But Adam and Eve were tempted by the snake. And the Bible says that when they saw how good for food it was, pleasing to the eye, and how they could gain knowledge by eating from the tree, that they ate. They thought that they had a better idea than God. Just like Judas thought he had a better idea than Jesus.

Example 2 – Abraham was told by God that he and his wife would have a child. The catch? They were super old. So after a little bit of waiting, and they still have no child, Abraham and his wife have an idea. Abraham could sleep with their servant, and then HER child could count as their child. So that's what they do, and she get's pregnant and has a child. Except that wasn't what God told them to do. Abraham and his wife Sarah end up having a child of their own. Ladies, can you imagine living in a house where your husband had a child with one of the servants? The tension became too much, the servant and her child were fired and told to go, and as a result, the two children became enemies, and their kids, and kids kids, and kids kids kids, all they way to today are still fighting! Why? Because someone thought they had a good idea. A way to get the ball rolling faster. Like Judas did with Jesus.

Throughout history, there are countless stories where people think that they know better than God, but it always comes back

to bite them in the butt. But it isn't just in history, it's today. How many times have I tried to justify my own actions because I KNOW the right way? How many times have I used manipulation to try to get MY way because I KNOW that MY way is the BEST way?

And that's when I realize, that I am just like Judas. There are times when I think I know better than God. "Well, if God would just get rid of all the evil people in the world..." (Twin Towers, Las Vegas, Orlando nightclub, Great Britain concert, Bombing in Middle East). "Well, if God let them get what was coming to them, then this wouldn't have happened..." "Well, if God was so smart, wouldn't he just make people so they couldn't choose to do bad things?"

Here's the thing: If God got rid of all the evil people in the world, he'd have to get rid of all evil. And I mean, ALL evil! Who am I to judge what is "evil enough" to be gotten rid of? So it's not just getting rid of evil at the murderer or rapist level, but all evil. Like lying, stealing, greed, pride, lust, judging. Pshhh, well if God was going to eliminate all evil, I definitely would be eliminated then.

If God let people get what was coming to them, we'd all be screwed, too. The Bible says that the wages of sin is death. What we deserve for what we do is death. But God gave us a way out in Jesus dying on the cross and taking that consequence on our behalf. All we have to do is believe and follow Him. Me? I don't deserve any of the mercy I have received. I have done some awful things to people in my life. I have hurt, I have lied, I have stolen, and I have judged. But God continues to give me another chance. I don't deserve any of those second chances.

"Well, if God was so smart, wouldn't he just make people so they couldn't choose to do bad things?" If God made people so that they couldn't choose to do bad things, He would take away their free will. That would take away what makes us human.

And it would take away the beauty of actually loving God and choosing to follow Him. If we are forced to follow and obey, what is that worth? We would just be robots and slaves. But if we choose to voluntarily believe, follow, and obey, how much more meaningful is that?!

You see, I don't know better than God. And when I do think I know better than God, I become the worst. In that moment, I am the worst.

Let's flip the tables. Has anyone ever heard a joke about heaven? Who is always at the "Pearly gates?" Peter! Peter is the man! Remember, when Judas betrayed Jesus and Jesus was getting arrested, it was Peter who whipped out his sword and started slicing and dicing! It was Peter who Jesus said, "Your name is Peter, which means 'rock', and upon this rock I will build my church. It is Peter who spoke in the book of Acts and over 5,000 people gave to their lives to Jesus in one day.

It is Peter, who denied knowing Jesus, 3 times!!! Even when Jesus warned Him that he was going to do it. Jesus even once called Peter Satan! He said in Mark 8:33 **"Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."** Woah! That sounds pretty bad! And yet, Peter is in heaven at the Pearly Gates, and Judas, well, Judas ain't there. I know there are people who name their kids Peter, but not Judas.

So what's the difference? What's the difference between Judas and Peter? We have two guys who certainly seemed to mean well. They both prayed. They both followed Jesus. They both dedicated years of their life to God. But they both screwed up. In huge ways. Peter was called Satan by Jesus, and the Bible says in Luke that Satan actually entered Judas. But we have one who throughout history is revered, who is in heaven in a place of honor, who actually wrote a few books in the Bible. And the other, who many believe there is a special place in Hell

for, who is known as one of the worst people in history, and for anyone to be called a "Judas" is to be called a shameful backstabber. So what's the difference?

In the book of John, Chapter 6, there is a point where Jesus is teaching, and many of his followers end up leaving Him, and he says this...

⁶⁷ "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve.

⁶⁸ Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹ We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God."

The difference between Peter and Judas is that Peter believed Jesus for eternal life. Peter may actually have been much worse than Judas, yet is most certainly in heaven. Judas did not believe that Jesus had the words of eternal life. He even realized he made a mistake! He tried to make things right! But he couldn't. So he gave up, and gave up on his life.

When I was studying Judas as the Worst Person Ever, I realized that Peter at times was the worst person ever. I also realized that at times I was the worst person ever. But I didn't want to stay that way. Just like Judas though, there is nothing I can do on my own to make things right.

I want to look at one more person before wrapping up: David. David was special. David was the chosen one. He was a man after God's heart. He was the one chosen by God to be King over Israel. As a teenager, he was the one who killed Goliath. He was the one who led Israel to many victories and defeated numerous enemies.

And then... he was the one who slept with a married woman. And then tried to cover it up when she got pregnant. And then had her husband killed while he was away at war. This was not a

case of David thinking he had a better way than God. This was not good intentions gone awry. This was just straight up adultery, murder, and sin.

When David is confronted with this (By the way, you can read about this in 2nd Samuel 11 and 12), he owns up to what he has done and repents. His punishment: His son that was just born will die. Something I hate about sin is that you don't always know what the consequence will be. I also hate the fact that one person's sin can carry consequences for other people. I hate when I have done nothing wrong, and I am the one paying the price for someone else's sin! It's the "woooooorrrsssttt."

The son of David paid the price for David's sin. David would then marry the woman Bathsheba, who was now husbandless, and have another son with her, Solomon, who become King, build a beautiful Temple for the Lord, write numerous books of the Bible, and be known as the wisest man in the history of mankind.

I like the fact that God redeemed the situation. One of the worst possible things, and God made something beautiful out of it. In fact, if you continue down David's and then Solomon's ancestral line, you'll get to Jesus. Who, by the way, is not known as a son of David, but THE Son of David. And just as David's son with Bathsheba died in his place for his single sin; Jesus, THE Son of David died in **our** place for **every** sin. (And some people say the Old Testament doesn't have anything to do with Jesus...)

Jesus was the only one who could make things right. Jesus IS the only one who can make things right. Even for the worst person ever. Even for me. Even for you. He has eternal life. And He offers it to everyone, even the absolute worst. The question is... will you receive it?

When He died on the cross, He bore my punishment so I didn't have to. He took on death and Hell. And then 3 days later, he conquered it and rose from the grave. If I believe in

that He is who He says He is, that He is God, and ask Him for forgiveness, He will forgive me. And then God will dwell inside me. I can be changed and live my life differently. In the book of Romans, it says that I can be transformed by the renewing of my mind. I can think differently than I did before. Think like how God wants me to think! Not thinking like how I think, which we've seen leads people to lots of trouble.

Some of you may think you are pretty bad here today, especially compared to other people. Some of you may think you are the worst. Some of you might think you are ok, to which I say you might need a reality check. In reality, we all fall short in some form or fashion. But God has made a way, so that one day when we stand before Him and He judges us, He doesn't look at everything we have done wrong and demand payment for it. He welcomes us with open arms because we can say, "Jesus paid it all."

- Invitation for Salvation

- What it takes to get into heaven is a perfect record. None of us can make it on our own record. Jesus' record can. He can switch our records in a "beautiful exchange."
- Once you know what He did for you and receive that, how can you not live your life differently in view of that?!