**Let Me Explain: A Sermon By Judas Iscariot**
Matthew 26:14-16



For 2,000 years my name has been **slandered** by people who really don't understand me, **especially by some preachers**. But your kind pastor said that you were an **understanding congregation**. I've come here today to tell you about myself and about the reasons I did what I did. You will give me **a fair hearing**, won't you? My name is **Judas Iscariot**.

Let me begin by telling you **a little** about my background. As you know **I am a Jew**. You have probably read some things about my ancestors: **Moses, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Isaiah, Jeremiah, to name a few**. There are many others which you probably know **very little about**. These are men such as **Habakkuk and Joel, Micah and Daniel**. All of these men had a **great love and respect for God**. Back during my ancestor's time God's name was **Yahweh**. **People loved Yahweh**, but **sometimes** my ancestors **loved Israel** more than they loved the Lord. We were all taught the same things as children: **Hear, O Israel**: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.

My ancestors tried, but sometimes their **nationalism** got the best of them. They were like some of you are, **more excited** about July the 4th than about Easter. They would **do anything** to keep their race pure and to keep other **religious and cultural beliefs** from creeping in. One of my ancestors, **Nehemiah**, wrote in his book what happened when he found out that some of his countrymen **married foreign women**. In those days also I saw the Jews who had married women of **Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab**; and **half** of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, **and they could not speak the language of Judah**, but the language of each people. And I **contended** with them and **cursed them** and **beat** some of them and **pulled out their hair**; and I made them take **oath** in the name of God, saying, "**You shall not give your daughters to their sons, or take their daughters for your sons or for yourselves.**"

The **point** of all of this is that my ancestors **loved Israel**, and felt that **God had a special hand** in carving it from among the lands of all the peoples of the earth. Yes, **they were just like you**. They would sin, then repent, and then sin again. But they **kept trying** to be God's people. The **claw of Rome** had taken control of my country's government about 150 years before I was born. Its grasp had seemed **to cancel** the hopes of many of our people -- **many**, but not all. A **group** of Jews remembered the promises which God had made: **the promise to bless all people** through Abraham; **the promise** to lead a group of slaves into their own land with Moses; **the promise** to be their God **if** they would be his people. Yes, this **certain group** of Jews never forgot those promises, even when the hated foreigners **came in and took over**. One family, **the Maccabees**, was the best-known of the leaders of the Jewish resistance movement. They succeeded in leading a revolt against the **most hated** of our enemies, Antiochus Ephiphanes IV. The Maccabees managed to oust him and **to cleanse our sacred temple**. That day **is still celebrated** today ... **it's called Hanukkah**.

But the revolt did not last, and the **hated tyrants** regained control. By the time **I was born**, the Romans had a **firm grasp** of everything relating to my beloved country. They **bled us** with taxes, and **regulated** every single part of our lives. **How we hated them**! And how **we hated** those Jews who **were friendly** to them, especially the prostitutes and tax-collectors. I was puzzled by all of this. "**How could God let this happen**?" I wondered. "How can **the promises** of God come true?" We Jews had read in what you call the Old Testament **that someday** God would send a Messiah to set his people free. I wondered when and how it would happen. We Jews were **so weak**, and the Romans **so strong**. Every night I would pray that God would send his Messiah, and that the Romans **would be damned**!

While I was still a little boy a man named **Judas of Galilee** organized a group of men who were concerned with **getting rid** of the Romans. These men were called **Zealots**. The revolt failed and **2,000** of them were captured. The Romans **crucified** all of them along the roads of Judea. Two thousand men **hung on crosses** as **an example** to anyone else who might try **to defeat Rome**. I **remembered** those men, and when I was a young man **I became a Zealot**. I'm **not proud** of everything we did. My name, Iscariot, **means dagger**, so you can **imagine** some of the things we did. But the Zealots **were true believers**. They believed in Yahweh, and in Israel. They believed that these things **were worth dying for**. And many of our band did die.

But I and my fellow Zealots took up **the challenge** and did everything in our power to disrupt the Romans and **to punish them**. The **problem** was that we had no leader. We thought for a while that John the Baptist might join us, but he did not. ***Then we heard about a man named Jesus***. He was from Nazareth, and the people told of his **mighty works** and of his love.

I **sought out** this Jesus and listened carefully to what he had to say. How **the hope** inside of me burned brightly when he spoke. His words were **like arrows** which pierced through to the heart of any situation. I just knew that he **could be our leader** in overthrowing Rome. Then an **incredible** thing happened. Jesus asked me to become a disciple, **to join** his inner circle of friends. I could hardly believe it at first. I had gone looking for him but **he acted as if he had sought me out**. He had a way of doing that with everyone, of making them feel that he was searching for them and wouldn't rest until he found them. I was made **the treasurer** of the group.

**What a man Jesus was!** I can still remember how he **taught** the crowds and **scolded** us disciples for **not understanding** everything he said. I came to realize that this man could be **God's Messiah** -- ***if he would***. He could lead us in a **successful** revolt against Rome. So I waited and waited, trying to be patient until the time was right. A year passed, then two. Jesus sounded **less and less** like a radical revolutionary. He told us to love our enemies and to do good to them who spitefully used us. Those were indeed hard sayings to take. We traveled much in those days. Jesus kept teaching; we kept listening. But I always wondered, "**When will Jesus turn against Rome**?"

The end climaxed quickly ... for him ... for us ... for me. The time came when he made up his mind to go to Jerusalem. It was during the time of Passover. "**Perfect**," I thought. "He is going **to declare** himself to be the Messiah, and the people **will join him** in driving out the tyrants." ***That's all I ever wanted***. The people greeted Jesus **with jubilant** excitement. They spread **palm branches** and leaves out before him. Some called it his **triumphant** entry into Jerusalem. I was **so excited** I could hardly stand it! "**Now**," I thought, "**now he is going to revolt**." It started out so well, too. Jesus went **into the temple with a whip** and drove out all of the crooked tax gatherers and money changers. **I laughed until I cried** with anticipation. The temple had enough money to raise an army.

But then Jesus stopped. **God help us**, ***he stopped***! He didn't even try to raise an army. He kept talking and debating. He was **doing nothing** to start a war with Rome. "He's going to miss his only chance," I thought. Then, like a heavy fog, the truth came in upon me. **I knew what I had to do** if we were to overthrow the Roman rulers. **Now this is where you come in**. You already have your minds made up about me. **You think you know why I did what I did**. You think I was **a greedy little coward** who would betray his own mother **if** the price were right. **No**! My motives were as pure as any you have.

"**What would make Jesus act**?" I wondered to myself. I didn't want to miss this chance. When I was a little boy growing up in Judea my mother used to tell me stories at night. I remember one ... about a horse and a donkey walking down the road together. The donkey was so loaded with cargo that he could hardly walk. He asked the horse to take some of the load. The horse laughed and refused. A short while later the donkey fell beneath his heavy load and died. The owner of the animals took all of the cargo from the dead donkey and loaded it on the horse. Then he took the carcass of the donkey and heaved it onto the back of the horse. The horse wobbled down the road thinking, "If only I had carried my fair share I wouldn't have to carry all the cargo and dead weight besides."

I was determined to carry **my share** of the weight of responsibility. I decided **to make Jesus act**, to make him lead a revolt. So I went to the chief priests **and devised** a scheme of leading them to Jesus. I thought that if I could cause a confrontation Jesus would have **to defend** himself. The priests even gave me money, so I took it to make the betrayal **look real**.

At the end of the Passover meal I met with the chief priests and soldiers. Together we went to Gethsemane. I saw Jesus and embraced him. The mob came; they arrested him. **I laughed** to myself. "This is **the beginning of the end**. Now Jesus **will have** to defend himself **and the revolution** will begin." ***But he didn't resist***. He didn't fight at all. Jesus simply went with them, **chained** like a common criminal. My plan **had backfired**. It was going to lead to Jesus' death instead of his victory. You will have to excuse me now, I’m going to find a tree.