

Why Easter Matters Session 2: Leader Guide

Session Two Overview:

All of Jesus' disciples struggled with viewing him as a means to an end. To one extent or another, they followed him because they thought there was something in it for them. There's a story in the middle of Matthew's Gospel that illustrates this point:

Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?"

"Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments."

"Which ones?" he inquired.

Jesus replied, "'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother,' and 'love your neighbor as yourself.'"

"All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?"

Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." **Matthew 19:16-24**

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What's Interesting is Peter's reaction to this idea that it's difficult for rich people to enter the kingdom of God:

Peter answered him, "We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?" **Matthew 19:27**

What will there be for us? Peter had the nerve to actually ask it, but every Christian has thought that. This was the question Judas asked constantly. From Judas' perspective, Jesus was a little too passive at times. He wouldn't save enough money. You need money to have a movement, but every time their treasury began to grow, Jesus would give money away. Jesus didn't seem to have enough energy or focus. Judas began to lose patience. Finally, something happened that was the final straw for Judas. It was an extraordinary act of generosity and it sent Judas over the edge.

Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

"Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me. **John 12:1-8**

Keep in mind that this is from John's Gospel and John was there, He was not only one of the 12 disciples; he was in Jesus' inner circle of followers. And he provided some interesting details. He noted, first of all, that Judas Iscariot was the disciple that took offense at Mary pouring the expensive nard over Jesus' head. John is also blunt about Judas' motive for

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complaining. He didn't care about the poor, In fact, he used to steal from the group's moneybag.

Yet it was a subtle but odd statement by Jesus that really set Judas off: "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial." Burial? Judas hadn't signed on as one of Jesus' disciples in order to see him buried. This Jesus was supposed to be the Messiah.

In the minds of most Jews, the Messiah would rise up as a military leader, drive out the occupying Roman army, and establish Israel as a world power-as the world power. If Jesus was the Messiah, then proximity to him meant great power, wealth, and influence. Being one of the 12 disciples would have its perks. As Judas saw it, burial wasn't part of the plan. Matthew's Gospel tells us what he did next:

Then one of the Twelve-the one called Judas Iscariot went to the chief priests and asked, "What are you willing to give me if I deliver him over to you?" So they counted out for him thirty pieces of silver. From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

Think about this: Judas was eye to eye with Jesus. He rode on a boat with Jesus. He saw the miracles. They shared meals. Judas was in Jesus' physical presence and he got so fed up because he couldn't get Jesus to do what he thought Jesus should do. Judas traded his relationship with Jesus for 30 pieces of silver.

Think about the things you've been tempted to trade your relationship with Jesus for. They're probably not any more valuable or lasting than 30 pieces of silver. But in the moment, it feels like the right thing to do because it doesn't feel like you're getting anything out of your relationship with Jesus. So, from then on after he made this deal, Judas watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over. Now, this was when the music changed.

Shortly after Judas made his deal with the high priest, it was time for Passover. On a Thursday afternoon, Jesus sent some disciples into Jerusalem to find a place for them to have what would be their last Passover meal together before his crucifixion. As the sun went down, they gathered in what's referred to as the upper room. And then Jesus did the

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strangest thing. He took off his rabbinical robe, put a towel around his waist, and washed the disciples' feet.

They were indignant because Jesus was acting like a servant and they wanted him to act like they imagined the Messiah should act.

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

"No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." **John 13:6-8**

And then this:

When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. **John 13:12-15**

To us, this is a story about Jesus setting an example of servant leadership. To his disciples, it was upsetting to see their rabbi humbled to the point of washing their feet. This was not what they had signed on for.

Later they retired to the garden of Gethsemane to pray. In the middle of the night, while Jesus was isolated from the crowds that followed him, Judas made his move. The high priest and the temple guard arrested Jesus. The events that would lead to his crucifixion were set in motion.

Everything was working out exactly as God had planned, because God's hand cannot be forced, and God's will cannot be thwarted.

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In the end, Judas' greatest regret-just like our greatest regrets-was associated with an attempt to hang on to something that turned out to be unimportant. Judas' greatest regret was his attempt to force God's hand.

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.

Matthew 27:3-5

Session Two Discussion Questions:

1. Have you ever tried to bargain with God? What happened?
2. Talk about a time when you lost patience God. What did you do? What happened as a result?
3. Do you agree that our greatest regrets are associated with trying to hang on to something that turned out to be unimportant? Why or why not?
4. The disciples were uncomfortable with Jesus serving them by washing their feet. They didn't like to see their rabbi humbled in that way. Does the idea that Jesus served you by dying for your sins make you uncomfortable? If so, why?
5. Can you think of a time when you refused to surrender to God because you wanted what you wanted? In what ways were you responsible for the outcome of that decision?
6. During last week's discussion, you talked about something you're currently trying to preserve that you need to surrender to God. Do you think the value of whatever it is you're trying to preserve may diminish over time? What would it look like to surrender it to God and let Him take responsibility for the outcomes?