

The Great Pretender - Matthew 27:1-10

Introduction: One of the great songs from yesteryear was recorded in 1956 by the Platters called “The Great Pretender.” The songwriter, in speaking of his love life, says, “*Oh yes, I’m the great pretender, pretending that I’m doing well; My need is such, I pretend too much; I’m lonely but no one can tell.*” Do you remember that song?

In our continuing study of the Gospel of Matthew, we’ve been looking at the account of Jesus’ last week before His crucifixion. We’ve seen this character before, but tonight we’ll see him again. His name is Judas, and in a sense, he was another Great Pretender. However, unlike the songwriter, Judas, while pretending to be someone that he wasn’t, was at the same time actually being someone he really wanted to be.

As we look at Judas’ masquerade tonight, I want us to also look at ourselves. How often do people pretend to be someone they’re not, but they are actually portraying themselves as someone they would really like to be?

It happens more than we might think. For example, when I was a kid, I’d go out in the front yard and pretend to be the entire New York Yankees Baseball Team. That’s all I wanted to be at that time. Today, I often will pull up to a traffic light and look over at the driver next to me and they’re pretending to be some sort of rock band member. They’re singing loudly and playing the drums or gyrating with an imaginary guitar to beat the band. Recently, a Maryland man was arrested for pretending to be a policeman – it seems he pulled over a car by using his emergency lights only to find out that the driver of the car really was a policeman! Pretending allows us to hide in a comfort zone. We are in our own little world, and we think no one knows who we are or how we are really doing.

This can even happen to Christians. Sometimes we can pretend to be something other than what we really are. But like Judas, we can only hide behind our false pretenses for so long. Sooner or later, the real us is revealed and we have to deal with whatever it is that we have been hiding for so long.

One of the stark evidences of this can be found in one of the world’s most widely-known athletes, Tiger Woods. Ever since he emerged onto the professional golf scene, Tiger has been portrayed as one who was above reproach in the world of professional athletics. There was nothing in his background or that appeared on his persona that hinted of anything being tainted. But apparently, according to all that has been revealed since Thanksgiving, he has been pretending for a long time. His private life has been exposed to be anything but clean, and the guy we have seen winning all those golf tournaments and garnering all those endorsements and accolades is quite different than the guy he really is away from the public eye. Apparently, the Tiger Woods we’ve known all these years has been a great pretender – hiding behind a mask of public perception.

Judas was a great pretender. He was a follower of Jesus, but all the while, he was only wearing a mask of religion. He was hiding behind a veil of ulterior motivation and no one really knew any different except for Jesus

So the question we need to ask ourselves tonight is this: Am I a great pretender? Is there any part of my Christian life that is just a cover up to who I really am?

You know, Christians can hide behind anything. Some people can hide behind small talk or laughter or education or even church attendance and can quote Scripture and use the right Christian lingo, and look real like a stained glass window on the outside, but on the inside, their spiritual life is a mess. Yes, even Christians can be pretenders. They don't want you to know who they really are so they pretend to be someone else, just like Judas.

Judas was able to hide his real identity for awhile, but it eventually came out when the guilt and pain became unbearable. If only he could have discovered the freedom of God's mercy and grace, maybe his life would have turned out differently. And that is what I want to talk about in the next few minutes – How our lives can be different and better as we discover God's mercy and grace. First, let's notice:

1. The Great Calling (Mark 3:13-19)

Of course, we know that Judas wasn't really who he appeared to be, but there must have been some quality in Judas that attracted Jesus to him because we know that Jesus chose him to follow Him. Perhaps it was his zeal or his abilities as a business man or it just may have been his charm, but Jesus hand-picked Judas to be His disciple. And Judas did that for awhile.

You know, this tells us something that we all need to understand. When Jesus calls us to follow Him, in His great grace and mercy, He's not looking for perfect people. He knows our faults and our weaknesses, yet He still calls us to follow Him.

Also, keep in mind that this is a calling – not a contract. Jesus doesn't grab us by the collar and force us to sign on a dotted line. He simply calls us. He issues an invitation to follow Him, but He doesn't force us to do so. He gives us the freedom to choose whether we will or not.

Judas was called and he hid behind the mask of his calling. He pretended to be a serious follower of Jesus but he had ulterior motives. Perhaps Judas had the best of intentions in following Jesus but he let other things distract him and he lost his focus.

That is so easy to do. People can start out with the intention of following Jesus but then something happens and they lose our focus. Maybe like Judas, they have ulterior motives in following Jesus. Maybe, something comes along that they think is more important than following Jesus. So they pretend. They hide behind the mask of religion so that others will think they're following Christ. And the more they do it, the better they get at it – even to the point of fooling themselves. People can actually think they're following Jesus while doing their own thing.

But Jesus said that if we want to be true followers of Him, we must deny ourselves and take up our cross daily. Now that is quite painful and uncomfortable to do when all that is within us wants to put our goals and our agendas ahead of Christ. So to keep the pain down, a lot of people choose to take the easier route and go

ahead with their own agendas, and just pretend to be a follower of Christ so they don't get discovered. That may be why there are so few workers in the church. People like to hide behind their church membership and make it into something that carries no responsibilities of service or ministry or tithing or anything that requires any kind of sacrifice. But to cheapen one's church membership in that way is to cheapen the call of Christ.

Jesus loved Judas and He called him to be a follower, to be a part of His ministry and Judas accepted that call. As Christians, Jesus has placed His great call on our lives as well. Are we following Him, or have we chosen something that we think is more important? If we choose our own way, then we are just pretending and hiding behind the mask of religion. We might be fooling others, but God doesn't look at the outside appearance, He always sees the heart. Secondly, let's notice:

2. The Great Betrayal (Mt. 26: 47-49)

In spite of the fact that Judas must have had some good qualities for Jesus to initially call Him to be His disciple, all we remember about Judas is his betrayal of Jesus. And for that, history has labeled him as a dirty, rotten scoundrel for what he did. Even the name Judas, a name that literally means "*Praise*" is now a loathsome name – a name that is associated with dishonesty and meanness. We don't even name our dogs "*Judas*" unless they are mean and vicious.

And isn't that just like us? A person may have a thousand good qualities, but let them make one mistake, and we're quick to remember only that. Herbert Hoover would be a good example of this. Hoover was once labeled one of the "*Ten Most Important Living Americans*" by the New York Times following his leadership in supplying millions of starving Germans with food after the devastation of WWI. Later, Hoover was appointed as the Secretary of Commerce under the Harding and Coolidge presidencies. His efforts centered on eliminating government waste and on increasing the efficiency of business and industry. Under his leadership and economic guidance, the housing industry was revitalized and many have called him the best Secretary of Commerce in United States History. Yet, despite all his accomplishments, Hoover is almost universally known for his failure to end the downward economic spiral that resulted from the 1929 Stock Market Crash that occurred less than 8 months after he became President.

So, we are quick to point out a person's faults aren't we? In a way, we enjoy seeing the bad qualities in others because then we don't feel so badly about ourselves. I mean, when we compare our faults with some of the evil out there in the world, we're in pretty good shape aren't we?

But then we come to **Romans 3:23 (NIV)** which says that "*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*" Uh-oh! That puts things into the proper perspective, doesn't it? When we are reminded of that fact, we understand that any sin causes us to fall short of God's glory. Any sin destroys our fellowship with God. In the eyes of God, all sin is wrong whether it's murder or telling a white lie. So we really can't afford to compare our sins with the sins of others and think that we're any better can we?

But wait a minute preacher. Judas was a betrayer. He sold out Jesus, and I'd never go that far! I might have my faults, but I'd never sell out Jesus. Well, we might not intentionally sell out Jesus the way Judas did, but in a sense, we sell out Jesus all the time. Whenever we choose our own way over His way, we sell Him out. Whenever we refuse to obey His Word and will, we sell Him out. Whenever we compromise our godly values for the cheap imitation the world has to offer, we sell Him out.

Like Judas, sometimes Christians can twist the kingdom of God in order to try and get their own way. Like Judas, Christians can try to justify their selfish actions in the name of God. We Christians can gossip and call it a prayer request. We can shirk our responsibilities that we've committed ourselves to and that others are depending on, and claim that, "*Well, I think I deserve to be out every once in awhile.*" But is that not selling out Jesus?

Whatever our reasoning may be, we too can be guilty of betraying Jesus. Any time we place more importance on something other than our allegiance to God, whether it be money, relationships, material things, etc..., we are selling out. We are guilty of betraying Christ. We may try to justify our actions, but God sees our hearts and He knows our motives. So we need to really look long and hard at where we are placing our priorities. Finally, we see in Judas:

3. The Great Mistake (Mt. 27:1-5)

Here we see that Judas was remorseful. He knew he was guilty and was sorry for what he did and tried to make up for it.

Now let me say something here that needs to be clarified. I believe that confession of our sins is what will lead people back to a right relationship with God. **1 John 1:9 (NIV)** says, "*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*" That is a foundational bedrock of forgiveness and it is universally and perpetually true. I also believe in the truth of **Psalm 103:11-12 (NIV)** which says, "*For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His love for those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.*" So, when there is repentance along with confession, God will be merciful and gracious and will restore the sinner back into a peaceful relationship with Himself.

Kevin Knudson wrote, "*The biggest mistake you can make is not the sin...No, the biggest mistake you can make is your failure to ask for God's forgiveness.*" What I am getting at is this: Judas was remorseful. He was sorry for what he had done. However, Judas made the greatest of all mistakes here. Judas went to the wrong place with his confession.

Matthew 27:3 (NIV) says, "*When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse, and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders.*" *'I have sinned,' he said, 'for I have betrayed innocent blood.'*"

Judas had one last great opportunity to go to the one he'd betrayed and confess his sin and ask for Jesus' forgiveness, but instead He made the greatest mistake of all and went to the chief priests, the religious folk, to confess his sin. And when they had the opportunity to lead this remorseful man back to the arms of God, they had no mercy, they extended no grace. They coldly and callously said to Judas, "*What is that to us?...That's your responsibility.*" When Judas needed someone to listen to him and point him in the right direction and encourage him, all he got was smirky rejection. "*We don't care.*" was what they said.

If the church is anything at all, it should be a hospital for hurting and sinful people. We are the Church of the living God and whenever people come through these doors, and whenever we go out these doors, we are representatives and ambassadors of Christ. And we should be little Christ's who offer grace and mercy to others. Why? It's because we found grace and mercy at the cross. There are people we come across every day who just want to know that someone cares. They are looking for someone to listen to them. They might not know that they can come to Christ directly and ask Him for forgiveness, so they come to us. And what we say and how we receive them can make all the difference in the world to them. May we never become apathetic and cold-hearted people who act like the chief priests and say "*We don't care.*"

Judas did the right thing and showed remorse. He just went to the wrong place to find forgiveness. He went to a law based religion that couldn't heal his hurt or make his past right. He was with the people who claimed to be people of God and they rejected him.

What I'm saying is this: There is grace and mercy and forgiveness to be found, but it is only found at the cross. If you are sorrowful for your sins. If you are willing to repent of them and turn toward God, He will welcome you back to fellowship with Him with open arms. There is no sin so great that He can't forgive. Judas never learned that lesson, but it is the heart of the gospel. Judas found his own tree and that's where he tried to pay for his guilt. I want you to know there is a cross with your name on it....

But you're not on it- Jesus is! And He went there to pay for our sins!

That's the reason Jesus gave His life; so that sinners could receive grace and mercy and be reconciled to God. So don't make the greatest mistake of all and fail to ask for God's forgiveness.

Conclusion: In Judas, we've seen what a great pretender looks like. We've seen a man who hid behind a mask of religion. He knew what was right in his heart but wasn't willing to pay the price of following Jesus.

If there is anything you're hiding behind, and you're pretending to be someone other than who you really are, you need to know that freedom comes from taking off the mask and letting God love you just the way you are. God's mercy and grace is found only at the foot of the cross.