

The Worst Friends in the World

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Date: 14 April 2017

Preacher: Nick Louw

[0 : 00] Good morning. Glad to see you all and I'm glad you could make it as we remember together the significance of that Friday all those years ago.

That most important event in human history. Sometimes having bad friends can feel worse than having no friends at all.

You know what I mean? When you've had a friend who breaks their promises to you. Or a friend who says nasty things about you behind your back.

Boys and girls, has that ever happened to you at school? Or maybe you've got a friend who's just not there for you when you really need them. I think all of us at one time or another in our lives have had bad friends, unfortunately.

Friends who, or supposed friends, who have hurt us. Who have made us sad. But I want to tell you this morning, if you ever thought you've had bad friends, it turns out Jesus had even worse friends.

[1 : 03] In fact, what we discover reading the Easter story is that Jesus had possibly the worst friends in the world. And we'll pick up the Easter story from where John read to us and have a look.

It was Thursday night where we pick it up. Jesus had finished his very last meal with his disciples. And he knew what was coming. Jesus knew his disciples didn't quite get what was going on.

But Jesus knew what was coming. He knew he was going to die the next day. And so instead of running away, he took his friends off to supper to a place called the Mount of Olives.

So that they could pray together in this final time together. But no sooner had they arrived there, that instead of praying with Jesus, his friends decided it was a good chance for a nap.

Already showing themselves to be not the best friends in the world. But it gets worse. It turns out that one of them at this prayer meeting was missing.

[2 : 00] Whose name was Judas. Now boys and girls, I want you to put up your hand if you have any friends named Judas. Judas. Okay? Alright. It's not a name we hear so often today, is it?

Judas. Moms and dads don't often choose Judas as the first on their list of baby names. Because Judas became famous in the Bible for doing something very bad. Does anybody know what it is? I'll give the boys and girls a chance for a second. Yeah? He betrayed who? Jesus. He betrayed Jesus. Jesus. And you know what betray means?

What does betray mean? Anyone? Yeah? Yeah, he doesn't want to be his partner. He turned against him. He betrayed him. Very good. Thank you. You see, Judas.

Let me tell you what Judas did. Judas was supposed to be Jesus' friend. Judas said that he was going to be Jesus' friend. But what we find out when we read the Bible is that all this time, Judas had secretly been helping Jesus' enemies.

[3 : 01] For money. So he could get paid for it. And so now, in the middle of the night, while Jesus and his disciples are having a prayer meeting, suddenly a group of armed men appear with swords and clubs and spears.

And do you know who's leading them right at the front? Any guesses? Tristan? Judas. Absolutely. Well done. Judas, the Bible tells us, is Jesus' friend.

The man who's supposed to be Jesus' friend, is leading his enemies to come and arrest him. But you know what? The armed men didn't know who Jesus was. And so you know what Judas does? He starts to point out who Jesus was.

And so he walks up to him and he kisses him on the cheek. Now that seems a bit weird to us in today's world. We don't normally, especially boys, kiss our friends on the cheek. But that was a way in the Middle East, in that culture, that men greeted their friends and showed respect to each other. It was a normal thing to do. And Judas would have done it many times as Jesus' friend. But now, he's doing it for the last time. As his enemy. And it makes us ask, if you've read the Gospels, if

you've looked at the story of the life of Jesus and his disciples, you've got to stop and ask, why? [4 : 11] Why would Judas do that? After all those years together, he had followed and lived with Jesus. Judas himself had preached the word. He had been chosen by Jesus to be one of his closest friends.

And he had seen Jesus do amazing miracles. But now, he's totally gone a 180. He's totally turned against him just for a few coins. Why? Why would Judas do that? Have you ever wondered? Well, there's many reasons and many spiritual reasons that Judas did that. But I think one of the reasons is because he was disappointed by Jesus. You see, Judas, all this time, had been expecting Jesus to become the king of Israel.

To establish an earthly kingdom. That's where he thought Jesus was heading and what his plan was. And Judas, no doubt, thought that he would have quite an important position in that new government.

But now, all of a sudden, Jesus started to talk about dying instead of ruling Israel. And so Judas doesn't really see anything in it for him anymore.

[5 : 16] In other words, to put it another way, Judas wanted out of Jesus, what he wanted out of Jesus, what he wanted Jesus to give him was more important to him than what Jesus wanted out of him.

What Judas wanted out of Jesus was more important to him than what Jesus wanted out of Judas. Now, of course, which was to follow Jesus no matter how many bad things came and no matter how bad things got.

But he didn't. See, Judas following Jesus was conditional on Jesus doing what Judas wanted. And so the moment Jesus didn't do that, Judas wasn't interested anymore.

A pretty bad friend in anyone's book. But now, it's no sooner that we read about Judas, we discover another bad friend of Jesus in the next few verses. I wonder if you noticed when John was reading, once Jesus had been arrested, all his friends just seemed to disappear from the scene.

They originally, they initially stood up and tried to defend him. But once he had arrested, suddenly his friends are nowhere to be seen. And they leave Jesus by himself. I remember once at school, every now and again at break time, when the group of friends I was in was bored, we would find something to do that we weren't allowed to do.

[6 : 36] Just to, you know, pass the time. By the way, this was before I was a Christian. I better say that, boys and girls. This is before I followed Jesus. Okay. But I remember one time we were getting up to some kind of mischief at break time.

I think it may have been we snuck into the classroom before the lesson and rearranged everyone's stationery in their desks. So it was in different desks. Anyway, so I took a row of desks and my friends had the other desks.

And I was busy concentrating on moving the stationery, what I was doing. When suddenly everything went eerily quiet. And I just had this feeling that I should turn around.

And I did. And standing behind me was a teacher looking straight at me. But what was interesting is that my so-called friends were nowhere to be seen.

They had disappeared the moment they detected trouble. They just got out of there without warning me. And I remember it to this day. They left me high and dry. And you see here, that's what Jesus' friends are doing for him.

[7 : 39] Jesus' friends, the moment they smell trouble, they're off. They leave him high and dry. But one of them in particular is singled out. You know who it is?

Peter. Peter's singled out. Now all of his friends. Now it wasn't that Peter was any worse necessarily than all of the others. But all of them had left him. All of them were trying not to get into trouble. Peter is, the focus goes on to Peter here.

And we discover that Peter was so scared of getting into trouble that he actually denied knowing Jesus at all. He had been with him for three years. He had been his closest friend.

And he denied, we see three times, he denied knowing Jesus. No, I don't know him. No, not that guy. I'm not that guy. And we read it. And you know what? Before we jump to conclusions and judge the poor guy, we can kind of understand.

I don't know what you would do in the same position. But, you know, he just wanted the heat off him for a while. Everything was falling apart. Yeah, he told a few white lies. He shouldn't have done that.

[8 : 40] But, you know, under the circumstances, was that so bad? Well, yes. And the reason is, and the reason that Peter was singled out for us and focused on, is because not a few hours before, and a few verses before, Peter had made a promise to Jesus that he would never desert him.

In fact, in verse 33, we read, Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death. That's what Jesus had said just a few hours before. He had promised his friend that no matter what happened, he would stick by him like a true friend should.

He said that even if everyone else deserted Jesus, he could still rely on Peter to be there at his side. But did that happen? When it actually, when push came to shove, when everything started falling apart, even Peter couldn't bring himself to do what he had promised.

And so he left Jesus stranded without a friend in the world. But you know what's interesting about the whole thing, sad as it is, is that Jesus knew all along that Peter would do this.

In fact, right when he had said this promise to him, when Peter had first promised him, we read back in verse 33. He said, Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death. Jesus answered, I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny me.

[9 : 59] You will deny three times that you know me. And I imagine Jesus said this with sadness in his voice. He knew what was going to happen. And of course, that's just what happened.

In the reading John read for us from verse 60, just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. But the Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. The Lord was under, Jesus was under arrest in the courtyard. Peter was on the outskirts.

And Jesus looked at him at that moment that the rooster crowed. And then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him before the rooster crows today. He will disown me three times.

And he went outside and wept bitterly.

You see, it was in that moment that Peter realized that he didn't have what it took to be a good friend of Jesus. Even though he wanted to be the best kind of friend, it turns out he just didn't have it in him.

And so he broke his promise. So there's a difference between Judas and Peter. They're both the world's worst friends in a way. Judas didn't want to be Jesus' friend anymore. So he turned against him.

[11 : 02] Peter wanted to, but he couldn't. Because he just didn't have it in him. And we look at Judas and we look at Peter. And we think they're possibly the world's worst friends. And we kind of hope that we never have friends like them.

But I wonder if we ever stop and think how sometimes we are like them ourselves. To our friends. Because think about it. In our friendships, with our friends, each of us have a little bit of Judas and Peter in us.

We too, like Judas, might only be willing to be friends with someone as long as we get something out of it. But if we don't, we move on to other friends who can benefit us more. It's human nature. Or how we too, like Peter, make promises that we don't keep.

We tell a friend that we'll stick by them through thick and thin. But then when the going gets tough and they really need our help, which is going to actually cost us something, we become scarce. And we don't answer their calls. And we're busy when they call us up. And we're nowhere to be found. See, we often can be like Judas and Peter to our friends.

[12 : 07] But maybe you disagree with me, which you're entitled to do. You're allowed to disagree with the pastor. And you think, well, I'm not like that. You think that you don't do these things to your friends.

And maybe you don't. Maybe you are genuinely a good friend. But have you ever then considered how you do these things to God? Which is even worse. The God who gives you everything you have.

Who gives you the gift of life every day. Who deserves your love and your loyalty. And yet, like Judas, you find you're far more interested in what he can do for you than what you can do for him. And when God doesn't give you what you want, you'll quite happily ignore him and go your own way. Or like Peter, you might desperately want to live the way that God calls you to. And you might make big promises to him on Sunday at church to obey him and follow him and serve him.

Only to see those promises crumble away during the week. When you're surrounded by worldly pressures and the pressures of life. And you forget God. And you forget your promises to him. And

you deny him his rightful place in your life.

[13:14] You see, we've all got a bit of Judas and a bit of Peter in us when it comes to being friends of God. We're not very good friends at all. But I want to tell you this morning.

That's why Easter is so important. That's why Good Friday is actually good. Because what's striking about this story. When we read over it again.

And I hope you'll go home and just read through the story of Jesus dying this Good Friday. What's striking about it throughout. About Jesus being arrested.

Jesus going to the cross. Is that Jesus knew every step of the way what was coming. He knew what he was going into. And he didn't run away. He knew he had to go through with it.

And he knew he had to go through with it. Because he knew that his friends didn't have what it takes to be friends of God. And that's why he knew he had to die for them.

[14:12] That's why he knew he had to take their sin and their failure on himself. So that they could be forgiven and be friends of God again through him. And he knows the same thing about you and me.

He knows that we don't have what it takes to be friends of God in our own strength. He knows that we are not good. He knows that none of us are good enough for God.

And it's when you realize that about yourself. It's when you realize that you're not good enough for God. That you can truly be excited and be happy and appreciate what this day is all about.

And what Jesus did when he died in your place to make you good enough for God. That is what Easter is all about. That is why Good Friday is good. Because Jesus died to make you good in God's eyes.

Even though you can't be good by yourself. And Jesus showed us. While Judas and Peter were the world's worst friends to him. He showed us on this day all those years ago.

[15:18] That he was still the world's best friend to them. By sacrificing himself for them. You see the difference between Peter and Judas though. Is in how they responded to what Jesus did for them.

We read later they ended up very differently. Judas and Peter. Both of them realized that they didn't have what it took to be friends of Jesus. Both of them were sad. Both of them felt guilty.

We read about later even Judas had remorse and felt guilty. But what they did with that guilt. Was very different. Judas kept his guilt. And he went his own way.

And it eventually killed him. While Peter confessed his guilt. And trusted in what Jesus did on the cross to forgive him. And from that moment Peter's life changed.

He became bold and courageous to spread the word of Jesus. At whatever cost. It was a complete turnaround. From being this timid, scared, promise breaking man.

[16:18] Who denied knowing Jesus. To being a man who spent the rest of his life boldly proclaiming Jesus. And eventually was executed for that. But joyfully. And he went and he did that joyfully.

Because he was looking forward to seeing Jesus again in God's eternal heavenly kingdom. Not the kingdom Judas was looking for on earth. But the true kingdom of heaven. That Jesus came to open up to all those who trust in him.

And so as I finish this morning. I want to ask you. Which one of those two friends are you going to end up like? Okay. Because we're all bad friends to God. Let's admit that.

Just like Peter. Just like Judas. But they ended up very differently. Which one are you going to end up like? Are you going to be like Judas? And go your own way.

Carrying your guilt for the rest of your life? Or are you going to be like Peter? And come to Jesus. And trust what he did for you on the cross. To forgive your sins. And make you a friend of God.

[17:19] For eternity. And that's what I want to leave you with this morning. As we celebrate Good Friday. Let us pray. Lord God.

We thank you for your word. We thank you for giving us these accounts of Judas and Peter. And for showing us how we have a little bit of Judas and Peter in all of us.

Especially when it comes to being friends of you. Our creator. Who gives us everything. Who gives us every breath we breathe. And yet we so often turn away from you.

We so often break our promises to you. We admit that to you. And we thank you. Lord Jesus. All those years ago. That you deliberately went to the cross to die.

For us. To take on our sin and failure on yourself. And to bring us back into friendship with God. Through everything you have done for us.

[18 : 18] And so Lord we trust in you. I pray Lord that everyone here. Today would realize what you have done for them. And would respond to it. Not like Judas. But like Peter. And would follow you into eternal life.

And we pray this in Jesus name. Amen. To be free.