



God with Us

 illuminate

Episode nine

Episode nine
Betrayal



How to use these studies

The study in front of you now is adapted from the 2014 Illuminate material. It is designed to be used by youth & young adult groups, small groups, or families to journey together through the Gospel story over the course of a year.

Illuminate Camp is based on a practice of 'storying', recapturing the stories behind the Bible texts we have heard so many times. It is an inherently community-based practice, involving reading the narratives together and participating in discussion as a group. The aim is to hear the stories as if it was the first time; to try and put aside the years of knowledge you have accumulated and hear them fresh.

To get the most out of these studies, we recommend the following process:

- Get a group of friends to journey through these stories together. These studies are also ideal for family groups. (While it is possible to do these studies solo, we cannot oversell how much better they will be if you do them as a group)
- As a group, read aloud the original Bible texts, based on the references below.
- As a group, read aloud the Illuminate re-write.
 - ◇ As you hear the story, make notes of things that stand out to you and questions that you have.
- If possible, read the original texts again, perhaps in a different translation.
- Discuss the stories as a group. Use the supplied questions as a guide, but don't be afraid to follow the discussion. Explore the stories wildly, asking every question that comes to mind.
- Pray together. Included in each study is a small Experience station that can be used as a guide for prayer and reflection, either as a group or individually.

We hope that you find this material as encouraging and stimulating as we did on camp. If you were on camp to hear these stories, we hope you find something new this time through. The Gospel stories are rich and complex, and no two times reading them are ever the same.





Episode 9: Betrayal

Intro

Imagine that you are Judas. Imagine how eagerly you, as a little Jewish boy growing up under Roman rule, have waited for the Messiah. Imagine that every time you saw a Roman soldier beating your uncle, or a Roman tax collector cheating your father, you balled your fists and quietly thought to yourself, "One day, someone will come along and stop this."

Then you meet Jesus and see all the miraculous signs that follow him. You think to yourself, "This might actually be the one."

But over the next three years, you see time and time again that Jesus is not a warrior. He is not a fighter. He doesn't spend his time planning to overthrow the Romans, in fact he spends much more time confronting the Jewish leaders than the Roman ones. Once or twice he even actively helps Romans.

It would have been shattering for Judas to realise that either Jesus wasn't the Messiah, or that he was and Judas was wrong about what the Messiah would be. The promise of the Messiah was a constant source of hope for the Jews over their hundreds of years of oppression. Judas had to abandon the hope he had placed in a military uprising and embrace the hope he found in a spiritual saviour who had a much bigger vision than just saving one nation.

Unfortunately, Judas wasn't able to make that shift. He wasn't able to put aside his expectations and embrace something different. So he cut his loses, making a profit on the way, and probably intended to return to his expectant search for the real Messiah.

We all place expectations on Jesus, and sometimes it's hard to know when those expectations might be colouring our perceptions of events. As hard as it often is, we need to accept Jesus as he is, not as how we want him to be. We need to not form Jesus in our image.

Access a video version of this introduction at vic.youthvision.org.au/GodWithUs



Bible References

Matthew 26:47-56

See also: Isaiah 11 for one of many prophetic visions of the Kingly Messiah.



Story

In Jerusalem, Caiaphas, the High Priest, began to hear about a man in the town of Bethany who had returned from the dead. The miracle, if that's what it was, was being attributed to Jesus of Nazareth, a name Caiaphas knew well. And, following the news of the resurrected man, were a series of chants and cheers. Dangerous words. Caiaphas immediately called together a meeting of the Sanhedrin, a council of the country's most respected Pharisees and priests.

The roomful of old men made such a din in their stone hall, Caiaphas was nearly deafened when he entered. He strode purposefully to his stone chair in the centre of the hall and waited for silence. It took far longer to come than it normally did.

Finally, when he thought he would be heard, Caiaphas shouted, "What shall we do about Jesus of Nazareth?"

"We keep on our present course," a voice shouted. "We show the people he is a blasphemer and fool through debate!"

"Don't be a fool," came a reply from the other side of the room. "The people love him, and when they get this way they won't listen to reason."

"Have you heard what he's calling himself now?" someone demanded. "The 'King of the Jews'."

A collective groan went up from the assembled men.

"May the Lord prevent the Romans from hearing that one," a priest said. "They'd march into Jerusalem and tear it down brick by brick to find the fool."

"Send someone to silence him!"

"It's too late for that," Caiaphas said softly, his voice cutting through the clamour. "Pilate has ears everywhere. Little birds who lurk in shadows and report everything that happens in this city. He knows. The only question is, what will he do?"

"He will kill the traitor," someone supplied.

"Yes," Caiaphas said, "but he doesn't need to kill us. We are on Pilate's side, are we not? We cannot tolerate this kind of behaviour towards our friends in Rome. Truly, it is better for one man to die for the people than have the whole nation perish."

The priests and Pharisees looked at one another. A collective nod went around the room.

"Very well," Caiaphas said. "It is decided."

"How will we get to him?" someone demanded.

Caiaphas narrowed his eyes. "Not all his followers are as loyal as he would have us believe."



Weeks later, it was the night before Passover, the festival that remembered God's saving power in bringing the Israelites out of Egypt. Jesus, having dined with his disciples, was praying in a garden outside the walls of Jerusalem. Eleven of the Twelve were with him.



The twelfth Apostle, however, was in a dimly lit room in the servants' quarters of the Chief Priest's palace. Caiaphas had refused to allow Judas Iscariot into the main part of the house.

Judas Iscariot, who hated the Romans with a burning passion. Judas Iscariot, who was not adverse to being a blade in the crowd, the glint of metal that would end the life of some Roman official or sympathiser. Judas Iscariot, who had waited for the Messiah with more eagerness than most, only to find the next in a long line of disappointments. A speaker, a teacher, a man of words and ideas. Not a warrior. Not the man to overthrow Rome and return Judah to its rightful freedom.

And so Judas Iscariot traded the life of this imposter, this disappointment, to the priests for a bag of silver coins.

"Your work is not done, Iscariot," Caiaphas said, jiggling the coin purse up and down enticingly. "Take these men—" He nodded at a complement of borrowed Roman soldiers and Temple guards by the door. "—and show them which of the men in the garden is Jesus."

So Judas led the men through the celebrating city, out into the cold night. They approached the garden cautiously, swords and clubs drawn, ready for anything.

They found the disciples among the trees in the garden, sleepy and still affected by the evening's wine. The soldiers spread out, seizing the Eleven, holding swords at throats when need be.

"What is this?" came a voice from the trees. Jesus appeared, returning from a more secluded part of the garden to find his friends held hostage by Roman brutes.

Judas walked to the middle of the circle of captive men. "My Lord," he said softly, and kissed Jesus—the sign he had arranged with the soldiers.

"Let them go," Jesus commanded the men.

Judas nodded to the guard captain. "He won't be any trouble."

The soldiers released the Eleven and walked towards Jesus. But as soon as he was free, Peter reached into the folds of his cloak.

He had had a feeling about this night. That something bad would happen. So, unknown to the group, he had visited a certain blacksmith in the town and purchased a small sword. Barely a cheese knife, compared to the weapons of the guards, but thin and easily concealed. A favourite weapon of the Jewish rebels. Peter drew the blade with a whisper and, with his other hand, seized the back of the closest man's robes.

The blade felt heavy and unusual in the fisherman's hand, so when he swung it he missed his mark and severed the captive man's ear instead of his neck. Peter was about to raise the sword again when he heard Jesus shout, "NO!"

His sword wavered, and in that moment the soldiers were upon him, wresting the blade away from him, and kicking him in the stomach. He collapsed onto the ground.

Jesus appeared at the injured man's side, holding his head with his hands. Suddenly, the injured man stopped shouting in pain. Jesus removed his hands, and the man's ear was completely healed.

The soldiers grabbed Jesus again, but Jesus looked at Peter. "This was never what I meant," he said sadly. "If you draw a sword, you will die by it. Don't you think that if I wanted to be free right now, I would be?"



Peter coughed and groaned. But the soldiers ignored him, and dragged Jesus away, down the path towards the city. The Eleven congregated around Peter and pulled him to his feet. They looked at each other, scared and confused.

"They'll come for us once he's dealt with," Thomas said firmly. "Let's not be here when they do."

The others nodded, and began hurrying back to the city by the darkened back ways the officials wouldn't use. Only Peter remained in the garden.

"Until the bitter end," he murmured to himself, before setting off along the same path as the soldiers.





Questions

- Which part of the story stood out to you? What made that stand out?
- Who did you relate to in the story? What was it about them you related to?
- Is there anything about this story that you hadn't considered before?
- What kinds of expectations did the Jews of Jesus time hold for the Messiah? How were these fulfilled or subverted?
- Can you understand why Judas betrayed Jesus?
- What kinds of expectations do we hold for Jesus today? Have you ever had an experience where you've had to change the expectations you've placed on Jesus?
- What would it have been like for the disciples to watch Jesus being arrested?
- Is it possible for us to go too far out of love for Jesus?

If you were a camper on Illuminate...

- What do you remember about hearing this story on camp?
- Compare that to your response hearing it now. How is your reaction different? Did you notice the same things? New things?

Experiences

You will need:

- A bag of silver coins (perhaps cheap plastic coins purchased from a two-dollar shop)
- Paper and pens

Spend some time reflecting on everyday temptations in your life. Write down some of the areas you identify as weaknesses in your own life. Place those weaknesses in the bag, amongst the coins. As you do, reflect on the following phrases (either printed out for participants to read, or spoken by the group leader):

"[Judas] 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." (John 12:6)

Judas had a weakness for money. This love of money led to his major sins.

We all have weaknesses for different things, and these weaknesses can lead to sins which harm ourselves or others. But God helps us overcome temptation by keeping our eyes on His bigger story.

Pray for each other, that God will help manage temptation in your lives and keep you focused on the bigger story.



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