

## **Truth Tellers**

### **By David Feddes**

*You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. (Exodus 20:16)*

The Gospel of Judas claims to reveal the real Jesus and the real Judas. The real Judas, according to this ancient document, was not evil. Instead, Judas was the only one of the twelve apostles who really understood Jesus. Jesus secretly told Judas his real message. Jesus taught Judas that the physical world is evil, that bodies are bad, and that people have an inner divine being. This divine self needs to escape the prison of the body to fulfill its divine destiny.

When Judas handed Jesus over to his enemies to be killed, it was not a wicked betrayal; the Gospel of Judas says that Jesus ordered Judas to do it. Jesus told Judas that he would surpass all the other disciples, because Judas would help Jesus to escape his body and become pure spirit. Jesus told Judas, “You will sacrifice the man that clothes me.” According to the gospel of Judas, Jesus did not die to get rid of the world’s sin; he died to get rid of his own body. Jesus did not rise from the dead in a glorified resurrection body, and he did not promise that his followers would be physically raised from the dead. Bodily resurrection would be tragedy, not triumph. Bodies are bad! No, says the gospel of Judas, Jesus offered guidance on how to escape being physical and human.

That contradicts what the Bible says. According to the New Testament gospels, Judas was not the best of all the apostles but the worst. He was a thief and a traitor. Judas was a member of Jesus’ ministry team, and one of his duties was to serve as treasurer. But Judas stole money that people had given for God’s work. Eventually Judas became so greedy that he decided to go for one big payday. He went to Jesus’ enemies and offered to betray Jesus to them for a payment of thirty silver coins. Satan, the chief of demons, entered Judas’s heart, and Judas did Satan’s work. He led a band of men armed with swords and clubs through the darkness of night to the place he knew Jesus would be. Judas gave Jesus a kiss, not out of love, but to help Jesus’ enemies pick Jesus out of the crowd and seize him. Afterward Satan had no further use for Judas. Judas was filled with horror and killed himself. That’s what the Bible says about Judas.

As for Jesus and his message, the Bible never says Jesus told people that they have a divine inner self that needs to be free of the body. It is not bad to have a body; the Bible says God created bodies. When Jesus died, it was not to get rid of his body but to get rid of our sin. Jesus did not just dwell in a spirit realm. He arose from the dead in a body that could be seen and touched. When Jesus returns, he will raise our bodies.

The gospels in the Bible say one thing; the gospel of Judas says another. What should we believe? When the Judas manuscript came to light, the news media gave it lots of publicity. You may have heard people say that the gospel of Judas is a legitimate alternative to the Bible. You may have heard that experts authenticate the gospel of Judas as very old.

Well, it is old. It goes back many centuries—but not as far back as the biblical gospels. The Bible’s accounts were written within a few decades of Jesus death and resurrection by people who knew Jesus personally. The Judas manuscript, on the other

hand, is dated about 150 years after Judas betrayed Jesus. 150 years is a long time. The author did not know Jesus or Judas. The book was written by Gnostics who thought bodies were bad. Some Gnostics called themselves Cainites. They admired not only Judas but Cain, the biblical character who murdered his brother Abel. This cult twisted almost everything the Bible said into its opposite and turned many villains into heroes.

Now, let's imagine a different example of writing a book 150 years after events, a book that contradicts the historical accounts of eyewitnesses. It's been a little less than 150 years since President Abraham Lincoln was shot. Suppose somebody sat down today and wrote a book titled *History of Booth*. Suppose this book claimed to give the real, hidden story behind Abraham Lincoln's death. *History of Booth* claimed that Lincoln secretly told John Wilkes Booth to shoot him, and the assassin Booth was actually an American hero. Now imagine that the person who wrote this book was part of a group called the Arnoldites. The Arnoldites are named after Benedict Arnold, the traitorous general who worked for America's enemy. Would you take seriously a book that said the secret of being a true American is to follow in the footsteps of Benedict Arnold, the traitor who double-crossed George Washington, and John Wilkes Booth, the assassin who murdered Abraham Lincoln? Who would pay any attention to such ridiculous lies dreamed up long after the actual events?

If such a *History of Booth* would be ridiculous, the Gospel of Judas is even more ridiculous. But some journalists and professors act as though it reveals things that place the biblical gospels in question. A similar dynamic occurred with the ridiculous Gnostic ideas described in *The Da Vinci Code*. Tell a big enough lie often enough to lots of people, and eventually some of them believe it.

### **Father of Lies**

How could anybody believe something as weird and wicked as the gospel of Judas? The answer is that these lies come from Satan himself and are backed by demonic power. It's not just that people's brains don't work very well. The deeper problem is that evil powers are at work in those lies. Liars cause confusion. Satan is the biggest liar of them all. Satan wants people to be confused about Jesus, not to have a clear faith in the truth. The gospel of Judas and other Gnostic falsehoods were the sort of thing the Bible warned of in advance. According to 1 Timothy 4:1-2, the Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.

As we've seen, people with a seared conscience ended up saying Cain the murderer and Judas the traitor were good. These were the kind of people who said the human body is bad and that people should avoid the physical pleasures of marriage or of eating tasty food (4:3). They loved death more than life.

Satan knows that if people believe his lies instead of Jesus' truth, those people will perish forever instead of enjoying eternal life with Jesus in glorified resurrection bodies. Satan is a killer, and he tells lies in order to bring death. Jesus said of Satan, "He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44,45).

From the very beginning, in the Garden of Eden, that old serpent, the devil, has been telling his murderous lies. God told Adam and Eve that they could eat fruit from any tree except one. If they ate from the forbidden tree, they would die. The first thing Satan said to Eve was, "Did God really say that?" He got Eve to doubt God's truthfulness. Then he told her that disobeying God wouldn't kill her. It would liberate her. She'd become like God herself. Eve and Adam believed Satan; they doubted God, and humans have been lying and dying ever since.

Whenever someone tells a lie, Satan is happy, and Satan advances in his murderous campaign to ruin lives and destroy souls. Not all lies are as spectacular as the claim that Judas and Cain were good. Lies and deception come in various forms.

A boy flatters a girl with sweet little lies about how much he loves her, but once she's gone to bed with him, he dumps her as used goods. A woman makes marriage promises and then decides she'd rather be without her husband, leaving him betrayed and shattered. A child in school acts friendly toward another kid, but behind his back tells others what a loser he is. A teacher grades a set of exams that are mediocre, yet gives them top marks, giving the students a false sense of accomplishment and depriving them of any incentive to improve and excel.

An athlete signs a six-year-deal, and two years later threatens not to play unless the deal is renegotiated. A salesman bamboozles a customer into signing a contract, only to be dismayed later at what the fine print turns out to mean. A researcher falsifies his findings or hides the dangers of a certain product so that it will reach the market faster, and people die as a result. A doctor lies and tells a patient there's a good chance she'll survive her cancer, thus depriving the dying patient of the chance to face impending death squarely and courageously and forcing her to endure the added pain and indignity of useless treatments. A politician makes all sorts of promises he knows he won't keep, and the people lose their confidence in government. A talk show host blabs a variety of rumors and speculations and half-truths, and people become cynical about everything. A preacher says one thing but does another, and his congregation starts to wonder whether they can trust anybody or believe in anything.

Is there anything more characteristic of the life of sin than lying? You do something wrong; you don't want anyone to know; so what do you do? You lie. And once you tell that lie, you have to tell another lie to cover it up and then another and another, until your whole life becomes a web of lies.

Lies poison relationships. Think of what happens when a group of people get together in a cafeteria or at a party or wherever. Look at all the smiles! Listen to how friendly everyone is!

"It's so nice to see you."

"It's been great talking with you."

But then notice the whispers and the dirty looks, and listen to what they say after a person leaves the room. The fake friendliness and flattery evaporate, the phony front is dropped, and it comes out what they really think of each other.

Our atmosphere is so polluted by lies that we're in danger of suffocating. We somehow need to breathe in the fresh air of truth and discover the life and liberty that come from "speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15).

## **God of Truth**

You and I need to be people of truth for our own good, and because God is a God of truth. If you know God, then you will love truth and hate lies. Why? Because that's what God does. The Bible says, "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who act faithfully are his delight" (Proverbs 12:22, RSV).

God loves truth and hates lies because truth is his very nature. The Bible speaks of the Lord as "the God of truth" (Psalm 31:5). It speaks of him as "God, who does not lie" (Titus 1:2). It also says "it is impossible for God to lie" (Hebrews 6:18). God's power is infinite, most anything is possible for him, but one thing God can't do is lie. Truth is of his very essence. God wouldn't be God if he were anything but absolutely true and trustworthy and faithful.

The Bible says, "God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak, and then not act? Does he promise and then not fulfill?" (Numbers 23:19) "For the word of the Lord is faithful and true; he is faithful in all he does" (Psalm 33:4). When God came to earth as a man in the person of Jesus, he said, "I am the Truth" (John 14:6). When Jesus was on trial before Pilate, he said, "In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me" (John 18:37).

And how did Pilate respond? He grunted, "What is truth?" That's the question of every person who'd rather avoid God, who wants to do something he knows deep down is evil. Just about every wicked deed is followed by a trail of lies, or else it's covered up by the biggest lie of all: There is no such thing as truth; nobody can be sure if God exists or what he's like; nobody can know for sure what's right and wrong. If there's no truth, there's no right or wrong, and that means I can keep doing what I'm doing. Some intellectuals have even turned this into a philosophy. What is truth? Who knows? Let's all believe as we please and do what we want—even if it means crucifying the Son of God, as Pilate did.

"What is truth?" That sarcastic question of Pilate denies that God is real and that his revelation is reliable.

We've sampled some of the havoc that occurs in different areas of life when we lie to each other, whether those are monstrous lies that twist what the Bible says about Jesus or the everyday lies we tell in dealing with each other. Truth comes from God, the ultimate life-giver. Lies come from Satan, the ultimate killer. It's not just that honesty is nice, and lies aren't nice. It's that we're either in league with the God of truth, or else in league with the father of lies, Satan.

## **Speaking the Truth in Love**

Truthfulness is crucial for a real relationship with God and for real relationships with each other. The Bible says, "Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor" (Ephesians 4:25). "Then we will no longer be ... blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is Christ" (Ephesians 4:14-15).

"Speaking the truth in love" is the key to relationships. So far we've seen the deadliness of lying and the need to say only what is true, and that's extremely important. Before we say something, we first need to ask, "Is it true?" But then we need to ask

another question: "Is it loving? Am I 'speaking the truth *in love*'?" What all this means is that we can't just ask whether it would be *accurate* to say it, but we also need to ask whether it would be *helpful*.

Suppose you tell a doctor or therapist or minister something very sensitive about yourself. Would it be okay for them to go and tell the whole world, as long as what they said was true? Of course not. Even if it's true, they are acting falsely because they are betraying a trust.

That's obvious enough in matters involving professional confidentiality, but what about ordinary gossip? A lot of gossip is wrong because it's nothing but rumor—but even if it's true, it is still wrong to broadcast sensitive secrets or to spread negative stories about other people behind their backs. Even if you're speaking the truth, you're not doing it in love.

The Bible book of Proverbs talks realistically about gossip. Proverbs 11:13 says, "A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret." If you've got a friend who spreads your secrets all over, that person isn't likely to be your friend for long. Gossips aren't very good friends. They also ruin other people's friendships by turning them against each other. Proverbs 16:28 says, "A gossip separates close friends." Maybe there's been someone you liked and respected, and then a gossip came along and told you some damaging stories about that person. It may have been something from their distant past, or something you didn't really need to know, but once you heard it, you never looked at that person quite the same way again.

When someone wrongs you, it's especially tempting to tell others what happened. You want to make sure everybody knows what a jerk that person was to you, and you retell the incident to poison others' minds and make them despise that person as much as you do. That's not "speaking the truth in love." Proverbs 17:9 says, "He who covers an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends."

Gossip does terrible damage, but for some reason we find it almost irresistible. We relish hearing gossip about people we know. If that doesn't satisfy our appetite, we buy magazines and tabloids or watch TV shows that offer gossip about actors, singers, politicians, and other famous people. The sleazier the rumor, the better it tastes. Proverbs 18:8 says, "The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man's inmost parts." Gossip is delicious. People are hungry for it; they digest it, and it stays with them.

Of course, when I am on the phone or part of a group that's talking about somebody, it's not really gossip. We're just getting caught up on the latest news. It's when other people talk about me—now that's gossip, and it ought to stop. It's hard for us not to gossip, and it's just as hard not to become furious when somebody spreads a rumor about us. Maybe that's why the Bible says, "Do not pay attention to every word people say... for you know in your heart that many times you yourself have cursed others" (Ecclesiastes 7:21-22).

We need to be sensible enough to have a thick skin when people spread rumors behind our backs, and we have to admit that we've done the same thing many times. But God doesn't want us to stop there. We shouldn't just shrug and say, "Well, the world is full of gossips, and I'm one of them. That's just the way things are." No, in the Bible God shows us the world as it is, but then he calls us to something better because of

who *he* is. He is the God of truth, and the God of love, and so you and I are called to speak the truth in love.

The Bible says, "A good name is more desirable than great riches" (Proverbs 22:1). When you protect and promote your neighbor's good name, you give him a priceless gift. When you attack his reputation and destroy his good name, you rob him of something very precious. As a general rule, then, if you don't have something kind to say about someone, don't say it.

That doesn't mean there are never times when we need to say things that aren't very pleasant. If you're an eyewitness to a crime, you need to tell the unpleasant truth so that justice will be done and the innocent will be protected. Likewise, if someone wrongs you, you can confront that person honestly. And if you see someone making a mistake which they themselves don't really notice, you may be able to help with a word of constructive criticism. There are times when we need to tell the truth, even if it's a bit painful. The Bible speaks many times of the value of a loving rebuke.

Still, there's a big difference between rebuke and gossip. In rebuke, you point out a person's fault to that person so he can change it. In gossip, you point out a person's faults to everyone else so they will have a lower opinion of him.

"Speaking the truth in love"—that is God's standard for how to use our tongues. The Bible says, "If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight reign on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless" (James 1:26). Did you catch that? "His religion is worthless." Lies and gossip are symptoms of worthless religion. They are the marks of a person who doesn't belong to God.

1 Corinthians 6:9 says that slanderers have no place in the kingdom of God. In declaring God's wrath against sin, Romans 1 mentions gossips and slanderers in the same breath as sexual perverts and murderers. And Revelation 21:8 says: "But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters *and all liars*—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulphur. This is the second death." Throughout God's Word, then, it is clear that liars and gossips belong in hell with the father of lies and all his lying demons.

## **Truth That Saves**

Left to ourselves, hell would be our unavoidable destiny, since lying and gossip seem to come so naturally to us. But God has not left us to ourselves. He reveals his unchanging truth in the person of Jesus Christ and in the promises of the Bible. The Lord promises that when we turn away from Satan's lies and believe God's truth, we will be saved.

So repent of your lies and all your other sins. Ask God to forgive you for the sake of Jesus' blood. Trust his promise of pardon and eternal life. Don't be misled by Satan's lies. Believe God's truth in the Bible. Then, with the help of God's Spirit living in you, commit yourself to a life of truthfulness, since you have been adopted as a child of the God of truth himself. The truthfulness of God is our only source of stability and hope. The Bible says that when we trust Jesus, we have "a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which *God, who does not lie*, promised" (Titus 1:2). In another place it says that because "*it is impossible for God to lie*, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor for our soul, firm and secure" (Hebrews 6:13,18-19). Isn't that beautiful? In a world of rumors

and lies, we have "an anchor for our souls, firm and secure." We have God's promises in Christ, and "it is impossible for God to lie."

Trust the God of truth, and become a truth-teller yourself. Trust the God of love, and "speak the truth in love" in your relationship to others. Trust the God of eternal encouragement and speak in a way that encourages others. "May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every deed and word" (2 Thessalonians 2:16-17).

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