

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben Kuerth on John 12:1-8 and Mark 14:10-11 at Victory of the Lamb on February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2015.

**Series: People of the Passion**  
**Today's Focus: The Opportunist**

**When the Devil Plays "Mine"-craft**

- 1. He's a gamer who custom designs his traps for people like Judas**
- 2. He's a goner who is defeated only at the cross by Jesus**

It's been described as a cultural phenomenon and it's one of the most popular video games of all time even though it's only a couple years old. Minecraft. Any of you play it? You can play it on almost every gaming platform—from console to computer to tablets and smartphones. It's crazy popular—and with both boys and girls. Many adults too! If you don't know what Minecraft is the best analogy I can come up with is that it's sort of like a digital version of Legos where you can build anything, there are virtually no rules, and you can either play just to be creative or play competitively against other people online where you try and survive. It's an incredible game.

Well did you know that the Devil plays a game similar to Minecraft? Yep, that's right. Except the game he plays is called "Mine"-craft. Let me explain. Online there's a [Wiki page](#) for the video game Minecraft. It explains the strategy for crafting over 200 different traps. I'm talking about traps designed to trick someone in the game so that so that their character ends up dead and you can take their stuff.

For example, the first category of traps listed is the Fundamental Traps category. Here you can learn how to craft a trap they call *Digging Your Own Grave – Tricking with Trust*. Here you can also learn how to carry out the *Minecart From Hell* trick which teaches you the concept of creating a false sense of security. Then there's one called the *Super Greed Trick*. Actually there's a whole major category of greed traps you can craft. Apparently there are lots of different ways that greed can be used for a trap which leads to someone's demise so you can make their stuff yours and say, "Mine!" That's what you can do when you play the video game Minecraft on survival mode. Unfortunately, that's what the Devil tries to do too when he plays his game, "Mine"-craft, where survival mode is much more serious business.

When the Devil plays "Mine"-craft he's a gamer who custom designs his traps for people like Judas. Judas is the first person we're looking at today in this new series *People of the Passion*. Judas was one of Jesus' closest companions. He was one of Jesus' hand-picked twelve disciples who for three years had travelled with him. So Judas had heard Jesus' sermons. He sat in on Jesus' Bible classes. He went to church with Jesus. He saw how Jesus loved people. And he witnessed the miracles Jesus performed. Judas had even earned a position of trust and responsibility among the disciples in becoming the group treasurer.

But then we see what happens when the Devil plays "Mine"-craft and how just hanging around Jesus and being with "church people" or even how being a leader in the church doesn't guarantee that

someone's safe. There's a very, very sobering warning in the cautionary tale of Judas that "If you think you're standing firm, be careful that you don't fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12). We read in the Bible:

John 12:1-8

*"Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. <sup>2</sup> Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. <sup>3</sup> 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.*

*<sup>4</sup> But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, <sup>5</sup> "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." <sup>6</sup> 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."*

Mark 14:10-11

*<sup>10</sup> Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them. <sup>11</sup> They were delighted to hear this and promised to give him money. So he watched for an opportunity to hand him over.*

So what happened here? Let me quickly recap the story. Lazarus had recently been raised from the dead. So on the Saturday before Palm Sunday, Jesus was in Bethany where a dinner was being held in Jesus' honor. Jesus was there along with Lazarus and his sisters Martha and Mary.

During this time Mary broke open a very expensive one-time use bottle of perfume imported from India. She poured some perfume upon Jesus' head and feet and wiped them humbly with her hair. It was a genuinely loving act of devotion. But the perfume was worth a whole year's wages! Judas objected to this extravagance and said rather scornfully, "How come this wasn't given to the poor?!" How pious sounding, right! Except that Judas didn't really care about the poor. Maybe he was hoping people would think he was so spiritually minded. "Oh that Judas he really cares about people" ...as if that perception would somehow allow someone like Judas the position to criticize and accuse others anyway. But in reality Judas was really thinking about others at all. He was just thinking that a year's worth of wages would be a nice large sum to steal some from for himself. Because after this Judas was so fed up that he slunk off to the chief priests who were delighted to offer Judas money, a paltry sum of 30 silver coins, in exchange for handing Jesus over.

Now, this has to make us stop and go, What happened here??? Well what happened is that the Devil succeeded in playing "Mine"-craft with Judas. The Devil was a gamer who custom designed a greed trap to get the best of Judas by exploiting what was his particular weakness—greed. So that in the end Judas was willing to sacrifice someone (Jesus) he didn't truly love for something (money) he loved more. You

ever do that? Have you ever been willing to sacrifice someone you didn't truly love for something you loved more? With the money he received from the priests (of all people!) Judas schemed for the best opportunity to betray Jesus.

Some of you know how this story ends. It's not a happily-ever-after story for Judas at all. Judas betrayed Jesus into the hands of the chief priests who took him to the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate who sent Jesus off to be executed on the cross. And at that point Judas knew he had done something sinful and wrong. His conscience tormented him. However the Devil custom designed another trap for Judas so that he got Judas to wrongly think he could never be forgiven—that his sin was somehow too great. So Judas felt trapped, so trapped with his guilt that he fell into utter despair of God's grace. In his despair he went out, crafted a noose, and hung himself from a tree. And for his unbelief he went to hell—the place, as the Scripture says, *"where he belongs"* (Acts 1:25).

Oh friends, this is no video game. And hell is no virtual place. It is real. It is horrible. It is eternal. There is no opportunity for redemption in hell. Yet this is how the Devil works and this is what he wants for you and me. His game is "Mine"-craft. But it's deadly serious business. He has a Wiki page that he has built up over millennia of dealing with human beings. It's full of countless custom designed traps that he wants to use to lead to your demise and bring you down. He'd love to do the same to me. To get a leader in the church to fall from grace through scandal, sin, and finally unbelief. Or to get any of you to think, "Ah I can make a few small concessions for my sinful nature, I mean what's the big deal? As long as I go to church it's all good. After all I signed the membership covenant."

Friends, which trap does the devil want to use to exploit your weaknesses? Is it the pride trap—to get you to think you're too good a church going person to do anything bad? Is it the greed trap? To get you to think that money is the solution to your problems and more money is the answer to obtaining your heart's desire? Is it the envy trap? To get you to set your heart on something you don't have but that you want so bad? Or is it the pornography trap? To get you to think that there's little harm in just looking? Is it the alcohol trap? To get you to think you can handle just one more drink or you need this to be calm. Is it the jealousy trap? To get you to think you're not getting what you're owed—whether respect or recognition? Is it the popularity trap? To get you to compromise your character or harm yourself or do something you know is wrong in order to get the attention of some group of people or to be liked by some girl or some boy?

Sin often starts in this way. Subtle. Simple. With a thought. An attitude. A desire. But listen to how this works. Whatever are the weaknesses of your sinful nature, here's how the devil wants to game you. The book of James in the Bible says, <sup>13</sup> *When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone;* <sup>14</sup> *but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed.* <sup>15</sup> *Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death* (James 1:13-15). If that seems like a creepy picture to think of desire growing like a baby in the womb which gives birth to death, I wouldn't disagree with you! It's meant to kind of freak us out. You see the devil takes our desires, sometimes even our good desires, and he turns them into opportunities for our sinful natures to trap us.

Friends, what desire does the Devil want to twist into an opportunity that leads to your spiritual downfall? What's the custom designed trap the Devil has crafted for you in order to seize the opportunity that your sinful nature affords?

Is it the happiness trap? This one is really popular today. To get you think, "God wants me to be happy. I deserve to be happy. Therefore if I think I need this to be happy, whether this person or that thing, then anything I have to do to make that person and thing *mine* is ok because then I'll be happy and that's what God wants." But friends, don't be deceived at the Devil's game of "Mine"-craft. The happiness trap won't lead to your happiness. It will leave you unhappy and hurt. And ultimately, desiring happiness more than holiness will never be God pleasing.

Finally there's the despair trap that often follows the happiness trap. This is where the Devil wants to get you to think, "Ah you need this to be happy. Take it. Do it. You know you want it." And then when you get it the Devil comes right back around and says "How could you be that stupid? How could you have fallen for that trap? Again? You can't expect God to forgive you for that much less anyone else. And don't think you're going to just make this go away somehow. I'm going to expose you. Imagine if they knew who you really are." See friends, here's the Devil's end game. Here's his most dangerous trap. It's the one that Judas fell into. It's what happens when the Devil plays "Mine"-craft. He's a gamer who custom designs traps for people like you and me just like Judas.

So what can we do? Is there anything we can do so we don't end up like Judas? Dear friends, the answer is we can look to Jesus and see the patient goodness and mercy of our Savior who loves us. What gets lost so often in the story of Judas, is the eagerness of Jesus to bring Judas to a realization of his sin in order to salvage his soul. During the Last Supper on the night Jesus was going to be betrayed, Jesus told his disciples that one of them would betray him. He actually identified Judas and looked him in the eye. Jesus was giving him the opportunity to take responsibility for his actions and repent. Jesus reached out to Judas with the same longing in his heart when earlier in the week Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem and said, "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.*" (Matthew 23:37).

Later on that evening when Judas drew near to Jesus leading a band of soldiers to arrest him, Jesus said, "*Friend, do what you came for*" (Matthew 26:50). It was as if even then, despite the fact that the betrayal was set in motion and there was no turning back, still Judas could turn back to Jesus and be forgiven, still be his friend again. Up to the very end, Jesus remained patient with Judas. More than anything Jesus wanted Judas to turn back to him and be forgiven. But Jesus would not force him. God does not force anyone to turn to him. Judas had to come freely. But he didn't. He wouldn't. Judas was not willing.

Yet Jesus went freely to the cross! This is why he willingly allowed himself to be betrayed so that he could suffer and die for all sinners—even Judas. This is why as he hung on the cross Jesus prayed, "*Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing*" (Luke 23:34). This was Jesus' response to his enemies. He did not call for his followers to pick up swords and seek his revenge like jihadists. He

prayed for their forgiveness. On the cross Jesus cried out, *“My God, my God, why you have forsaken me?”* (Matthew 27:46). My friends, what does this mean? It means that as Jesus was on the cross and as the sky went dark, he was suffering the darkest torment of hell, the separation from God’s loving gaze and the sorrow of this separation, so we wouldn’t ever have to. Jesus did this in our place. He was abandoned by His Father so you and I would never have to be. Jesus drank the full strength cup of God’s wrath for sins, all sins great and small, so that you and I wouldn’t have to.

Friends, it is a tragedy that Judas forfeited the grace that could’ve been his. It is certainly a sobering and cautionary tale for each of us. But don’t ever forget this: It is God’s will that no one should perish. Not me. Not you. Not anyone. That is why he sent his Jesus. It’s why Jesus willingly went to the cross. The Bible says, *“[God] is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance”* (2 Peter 3:9b).

Therefore, so as long as you or I or anyone else has life and breath here on this earth, there always remains the opportunity, our time of grace, to admit our need and to receive and to receive God’s full and free forgiveness through faith in Jesus Christ.

When the Devil plays “Mine”-craft...1) He’s a gamer who custom designs his traps for people like Judas (who’s just like you and me) but 2) He’s a goner who is defeated only by the cross of Jesus! Amen.

### **My Next Steps**

**Question to Ponder:** If you were working for the devil, what custom designed “opportunity” would you craft to lead to your own spiritual downfall?

**Treasure to Share:** *“[God] is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance”* (2 Peter 3:9b).

**Action to Take:** What answer did you come up with for the Question to Ponder? Pray about that area of your life. Ask God for wisdom to identify the trap and the strength to resist the temptations when you face them.

In addition, Christians will want to put wise checks and balances into their life. What does this need to look like in your life? Talk about this openly and honestly with a trusted Christian friend who knows you well and has your back.