In an indirect but very important way, recognizing what Judas actually betrayed is central to understanding the life and death of Jesus. It goes to the heart of his messages and explains why he was crucified. Even so, it is a complicated matter and has not been fully thought out even by many New Testament scholars.

It is commonly supposed, of course, among lay-folk and scholars alike, that Judas indicated to the authorities where Jesus could be found apart from the crowds. Maybe that’s right, even though I do have some doubts about it. Even if it is right, there may be more to it than that. I think the following data are worth bearing in mind, leading to the resolution of the question that I prefer. (At first these data may not seem relevant: but hang in there for a minute!)

- Jesus almost certainly did not publicly claim that he was the messiah during his lifetime; more specifically, he never publicly announced that he was the King of the Jews. In our earliest accounts — esp. Mark — he does *accept* the title messiah in a public setting when asked about it, but only at the very END of his life, at his trial (Mark 14:61-62). And never is the King of the Jews a term Jesus uses of himself in the Gospels during his public ministry. That is key.

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