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JUDAS— “WHO ALSO BETRAYED HIM”

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The Gospel records are amazingly reticent, yet very revealing. The casual reader often misses items of unusual importance, and not infrequently significant matters are hidden in untranslatable idioms in the Greek of the New Testament. All of these factors may be seen in Mark 14:1-11, which gives us a penetrating analysis of the character of Judas even while apparently so little is said.

In the first instance, the Evangelist speaks of the scheming of the chief priests and scribes against Jesus (verses 1 and 2), and then apparently changes the subject. However, there is a deliberate purpose on the part of the Evangelist as he records this scheme and then moves on to record the incident of the anointing of our Lord. Both of these matters stand as essential background to what is so briefly told in verses 10 and 11 concerning the Betrayal.

The episode in the house of Simon the Leper at Bethany contains many interesting points which may not be essential to the story of Judas, but they are nevertheless instructive. What was the connection between Simon the Leper and the household of Lazarus, Mary and Martha? Was Simon, a Pharisee and one-time leper, a brother of the better-known trio? And who was the woman who brought the precious alabaster box of spikenard? The Fourth Evangelist is quite explicit: it was Mary of Bethany (John 12:3). But who is Mary of Bethany? It is quite obvious that she is the sister of Martha and Lazarus; but this is not a sufficient answer. While Mary was one of the most common names among Jewish women, there were two Marys who were prominent among the followers of Jesus: Mary of Bethany and Mary Magdalene. Nevertheless, they are never clearly and unmistakably mentioned as being together. This, and other factors in the Gospel records, has led careful commentators to raise the question: are Mary of Bethany and Mary Magdalene the one and

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same person? This question takes on an added urgency if we accept the suggestion that Luke 7:36-50 is really telling the same story that we find in Matthew 26:6-13, which is obviously the parallel of Mark 14:3-9 and John 12:1-8. Mark 16:9 supplies one of the identifying touches: '... Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils' (See Luke 8:2). Guess-work comes into the picture here, for the Gospels nowhere are quite explicit. Nevertheless, difficulties of interpretation are cleared away if we do accept the identification of Mary of Bethany with Mary Magdalene. Otherwise we are at a loss to account for the strange absence of Mary of Bethany from the record of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection. Further, the recorded behaviour of Mary Magdalene, especially in the Fourth Gospel, shows a peculiar similarity with the kind of action we see in Mary of Bethany, who, of course, is never called Mary 'of Bethany' in the Gospels.

If we accept the suggestion that the woman who anointed our Lord in Bethany was in fact Mary Magdalene, there are extra lessons to be drawn from the behaviour of Judas. Their identification was made by J. D. Jones, who did not hesitate to point out the consequences, and who made references to the Puritan divines who made much of the contrast between Mary Magdalene and Judas. The old divines, who loved to use typology, spoke of Mary as a type of heaven, which is self-giving love, and Judas as a type of hell, which is selfish hate. Certainly in whatever way we may look at Mary Magdalene and Judas we see great contrasts in them. If this identification of the woman with the alabaster box of spikenard is correct, she is a person who had become so depraved that the Gospel record is frank to describe her as one from whom Jesus had cast out seven devils. Could the Gospel record have more specifically branded her as a woman with a wicked and depraved background? But she was a woman who came under the touch of the Master's hand, and she was transformed: she who was forgiven much, loved much. The devotion which she had towards Jesus is quite clearly displayed in the record. Was there any of those in the immediate company of Jesus who exceeded her in devotion? The depth of that love becomes explicit when we study the narrative of the

Resurrection in the Fourth Gospel. Thus we are able to see how a soul moved from darkness into light; out of sin and shame into sainthood. Is there any better illustration of the power of our Lord to transform a life?

When we look again at Mark 14:3-9 we see not only clear praise of the action of this woman, but we see also an equally clear, though not so explicit, condemnation of the attitude of Judas. This becomes more clear when we read the parallel passages, especially John 12:4-6. 'Three hundred pence' (or denarii) was a very large sum in those days, and especially so in the company of the disciples. It should be remembered that a denarius a day was considered to be quite good pay for a days' labour, as is made explicit in our Lord's parable in Matthew 20:1-16.

We have already seen what has happened to Mary to make her so lavish in her sign of love and devotion; but what has been happening to Judas? Why does he behave as he does? Smarting under this implied rebuke, he goes out to arrange to betray Jesus. Why?

It is not good enough to answer that question by saying that our Lord chose Judas to be a disciple knowing, when he chose him, that he would be the betrayer. Such a suggestion comes out of an extreme form of theological presupposition which has no scriptural basis, and is to be rejected with as much scorn as the more modern suggestion (made, appropriately enough, by a novelist!) that Judas acted from the very highest motives, and was merely trying to force Jesus to 'show his hand'. If Judas was 'fated' to be the betrayer, where lies the freedom of a soul to choose between good and evil? If Judas was 'fated' to be the betrayer, the very Gospel itself becomes meaningless! No! When our Lord chose Judas to be one of the Twelve, he was chosen because our Lord saw in him the possibilities of making out of him both a saint and an apostle, just as He saw such possibilities in Peter and Andrew and James and John and the rest. Certainly, there came a time later when our Lord knew that Judas was ready to betray him, and it is very clear (especially in John's Gospel) that Jesus made every possible endeavour to change Judas's mind. Nevertheless, when it was finally evident that Judas was not going

to respond to love's last appeal, our Lord permitted Judas to go and do what he planned to do. A single word from Jesus, in the Upper Room, would have assured that the Eleven would not have permitted Judas to leave that Room to go to his rendezvous with the Chief Priests. There is much to be learned from the manner in which our Lord protected even Judas when, in the freedom of his own choice, he went out to do evil. Nor should we forget the horrid fate of the betrayer, who 'went to his own place'.

But we still have not attempted to answer the question: Why did Judas betray Jesus? The answer appears to be rather clearly given in the Gospel narrative, though we do not always have eyes to see the answer. There seem to be three things which combine in the character of Judas to produce the fatal flaw. There was no excuse for the continuation of any one of the three faults. But if we are to be true to the record, we must look at them frankly.

In the record we see that Judas was covetous. Somehow the snare of riches had taken hold of him. His background may help to account for this, but it does not excuse it. The Gospels tell us frankly that Judas stole money from the common purse which was entrusted to his care. This betrayal of trust reveals a man whose sense of values is counted in the coinage of this world. Was his attitude in any way different from that of the modern secularist or materialist? Around him he had the example of our Lord and others who had rejected the world's sense of values. It seems probable that the other disciples discovered that the funds had been interfered with only after Judas had departed, but they later interpreted certain of his actions in terms of his betrayal of this particular trust. Might it be legitimate to assume, then, that Judas was all the more ready to consider financial profit in his act of betrayal? There is no evidence to suggest that he was ready to betray Jesus for the sake of the thirty pieces of silver, rather, he was ready to make financial profit out of something which he had already determined to do. His covetousness, then, does not seem to be the determining factor in his willingness to betray Jesus. But it was a serious weakness in his character:

a weakness which combined with other weaknesses to make him capable of this betrayal.

It is appropriate here to pause to ask how many people, in the history of the Church, have betrayed Jesus because of their love of money and the things of this world? One of the greatest challenges to the progress of Christianity in our times is the secular spirit. Material prosperity—actual or desired—can be one of the most bitter enemies of the progress of the Gospel. Judas is by no means the only person who has had his eyes so much on material gain that he has failed to see the eternal riches. Yet, we may well ask, how was it possible that Judas could have spent those years in the company of Jesus and still have been covetous? This is a mystery of the sins which so easily beset us! Who dares to cast the first stone at Judas?

There was, moreover, another sin tugging at Judas. We can see in the record the clear marks of his ambitious nature. Is this to say that 'ambition' is therefore a sin? The motives for ambition determine whether the ambition is good or evil. In the case of Judas, he was selfishly ambitious. Undoubtedly all of the disciples were in some degree ambitious. But there comes a dividing line between a good ambition and an evil one. Their first loyalty was to Jesus, and whatever ambitions they had were subject to that loyalty. Not so in the case of Judas. His prime ambition was centred upon himself. We can probably identify the exact form which his ambition took. As the only member of the Twelve who held office in the group, he undoubtedly thought of himself as having a real claim to primacy among them. His office was that of treasurer. There was much talk about the 'Kingdom of God'. To the average Jew this term had definite earthly connotations, and it would be no surprise if Judas had his mind full of pictures of an earthly kingdom which would rival Solomon's kingdom in physical glory. We know that the disciples repeatedly misunderstood our Lord, and even after the Resurrection, in Acts 1:6 we find the Eleven asking about the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel. May it not be fair, then, to question whether Judas had not filled his own mind with visions of the glorious Kingdom which Jesus was about to set up, and that this

Kingdom was expected to be a physical, materialistic one, with the Imperial Palace and Court set up in Jerusalem? And surely if Judas was the treasurer of the group of the Twelve, was that not proof of the fact that he was being prepared for the office of Treasurer in the new Kingdom? Treasurers in such Kingdoms became very powerful—and very wealthy. There were plenty of illustrations of that kind of thing happening in Jewish history. Every Jew in those days knew about the House of Tobias. Was Judas visualizing himself as the founder of another great and fabulously wealthy House? Of course, all this depended upon Jesus becoming the King. Judas was undoubtedly astute enough to read the mind of Jesus sufficiently well to realize that Jesus was not ambitious for wealth or earthly position as such. Therefore this would encourage the grasping, covetous and ambitious mind of Judas to expect even greater things for himself.

However, when Jesus so seriously talked of his own approaching death, and underlined it so strongly in the comments which followed the criticism of Mary for 'wasting' the precious spikenard, it must have ultimately dawned upon Judas that Jesus was completely serious when he spoke of his approaching death. What did this do to the ambitions of Judas? He had so permitted his ambitions to fill his own mind that he was not able to hear or understand what Jesus was really saying. But when the truth finally dawned upon him, he was so obsessed with his own ideas and ambitions that he must have looked upon Jesus as the one who had betrayed him! Here he was, a man who had a future, having given some of the best years of his life to following a leader whom he had expected to lead him to his own suitable reward, and now he finds that the leader is leading him nowhere! So blind has Judas become that he cannot see beyond the Kingdom of this world.

Judas must have known that the chief priests had long been seeking to destroy Jesus. The Gospels are full of the record of the efforts of the enemies of Jesus to destroy him, but, after the record of the raising of Lazarus, there is the specific record of the manner in which the chief priests and Pharisees laid plans to put Jesus to death. (John 11:47-54). It is impossible to imagine that Judas was unaware of these things. Consequently,

in his disappointment when he finds his own ambitions foiled, Judas is ready to take a bitter revenge upon the one whom he imagined had betrayed him! He knows that the authorities do not want to take Jesus openly, because they feared popular reactions. The only way in which Jesus could be taken without much danger of rioting would be at night. But who would be able to find him at night, in the crowded environs of Jerusalem at the Feast time? Thus when Judas went to the chief priests he took two items of information: the ability to guide the authorities, secretly, to the place where Jesus could be found at night; and the information that Jesus was expecting to be put to death and was talking of the cross. Obviously a man who was talking like that would not offer serious resistance, though the temper of his followers might be different. Consequently, the chief priests were quite eager to act on the information which was supplied by Judas.

Here again it is appropriate to pause and to ask how many people have attempted to use our Lord for the purpose of fulfilling their own private ambitions? How often do we say to Him: 'This is what I want to do or become'. How often are we upset or resentful because He does not become the fulfiller of our selfish desires? Who is the real Lord of our lives? Christ or our own selves? We must scrutinize our own desires and attitudes very carefully before we dare cast stones at Judas for his sin!

There was a third sin tugging at Judas, leading him into the great betrayal. It was the sin of jealousy. This is perhaps the key to the whole tragic story.

In Mark 14:10 there is a peculiarity in the Greek text which defies translation, but which is most illuminating. Ancient copyists have frankly had trouble with this text. A principle of Biblical interpretation lays it down that the most difficult reading is to be preferred unless it can be proven that the reading in question is clearly an error in copying. The principle behind this statement is that copyists, when they come to a difficult statement, always tend to try to interpret it or to simplify it. There are a considerable number of variations of the Greek text of the opening part of Mark 14:10, which in the A.V. reads:

'And Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve. . . .' In the Greek there is a repeated use of the emphatic masculine nominative of the definite article. Almost all of the major documents of the Greek Testament could be literally translated: 'And *the* Judas of Kerioth, *the* one of the twelve', while one of the important manuscripts goes so far as to render the passage: 'And the Judas he who was the one of Kerioth, the one of the twelve. . . .' In Greek this particular usage of the definite article is an idiom which implies greatness or peculiar significance. Throughout the Gospels it is quite common to use the definite article before the name of Jesus, and it does occur in connection with the names of certain of the disciples. Therefore it is not remarkable that it is used before the name of Judas. In that case it could be argued that it meant either 'the famous Judas' or 'the notorious Judas'. But the remainder of the usage cannot be so easily explained. What is implied by the most difficult rendering (which is supported by one of the best Biblical documents) is extremely revealing. The document uses the maximum number of nominative definite articles, and to gather the full sense of the text we would need to render it into rather awkward English: 'The famous (or notorious) Judas, the important man from the famous Kerioth, he who ranks as the first of the Twelve. . . .'

The implications of this passage are slightly startling. In the first instance, there is something mysterious about the town of Kerioth. Two towns of that name are known, one in Judah and the other in Moab. It has been seriously urged that Judas was from the town in Moab. If this is the case, then Judas was a foreigner in the group of the 'Twelve. But, whether this be so, it is at least certain that the manner in which Judas is described implies that he was one of the 'elders' of his home town, or one of the hereditary chiefs of his community. Thus we see Judas as a man of importance before he becomes a disciple of our Lord. It might be added at this point that it is completely erroneous to talk of the 'Twelve as being 'simple fishermen', or belonging to the lower classes of their communities. All of the evidence which is available to us indicates the exact opposite. The nature of the ambitions of Judas may be more easily understood when we realize

the circumstances from which he came. As we go on to notice the peculiar reference to the status of Judas among the Twelve . . . 'he who is the first of the Twelve' . . . we are brought face to face with an idea which startles us. In the lists of the Twelve his name always comes at the *end*. That is perfectly natural, for the Gospels were not written until long after the betrayal, and the name of Judas was forever associated with his infamy. But had the list been established immediately after our Lord had named the Twelve, where would the name of Judas have stood? At the head of the list? If we are to judge from Mark 14:10 the answer must be 'yes'!

However, precedence in the Kingdom of God is a matter of spiritual qualification. Whatever Judas may have been when he was first among the disciples of our Lord, the time came when he ceased to have that spiritual primacy, and Peter and James and John began to be the inner circle of the leadership within that group. Something in the character of Judas could not stand that loss of actual primacy. He could not bear being the first in actual office (as treasurer) but not to be first in the confidence reposed in him. How could he stand seeing Peter and James and John being alone with Jesus on certain privileged occasions, such as the time of the Transfiguration? While he may not have known what occurred on these privileged occasions, he could not miss the fact that there were occasions when he was excluded, and three of his colleagues were included. Thus the jealousy of Judas appears, and we begin to see the true measure of the man. The only person who becomes jealous is the 'little' person. Is it, therefore, the final word concerning Judas to say that he could not measure up to the greatness of the opportunity placed before him, and he bitterly resented those who were able to meet the challenges of the hour?

It seems to be the nature of the jealous person that he seeks to inflict hurt upon those who appear to have thwarted his desires. But more particularly, the jealous person is self-centred. Herein lies the key to the full measure of the tragedy of Judas. Whatever may have been the case at an earlier date, he becomes the man whose interests are bounded by his own little horizon.

From the tragedy of Judas at least two important lessons may be learned. He would never have been in the company of the disciples had he not been impressed by Jesus, but it is obvious that he never did understand the purpose of our Lord, and he did not give to Jesus his first and undivided loyalty. It would be unrealistic to suggest that any of the disciples was perfect, but the essential difference between Peter and Judas is that while Peter denied his Master, and Judas betrayed his Master, Peter showed very clearly that he loved his Master more than he loved himself. On the other hand, Judas demonstrated that he had become so self-centred that his love for himself was greater than any love he had to offer to Jesus. Peter's bitter weeping was the proof of his sorrow and sense of shame that he had failed his Master. Judas, when he saw how his world had been destroyed around him, was incapable of repentance. He was sorry only for himself. And in this self-pity he committed suicide. In that final act Judas wrote his own epitaph: so ended the life of one who served himself.

The second lesson to be learned from this tragedy is the fact that even those who have great privileges can be the most abject failures. It is hard to conceive of any advantage which was not offered to Judas, yet he stands out as the most miserable figure in all history. As one of the Twelve he journeyed with our Lord, heard His preaching, saw the miracles He performed, and shared in a fellowship which was unique in all history. Ultimately he was so little impressed by the experiences which had been his that he was ready to betray the One Who invited him to be a partaker in that fellowship. How different, for example, from the spiritual pilgrimage of his fellow-disciple, Thomas, who, after experiencing the same things, and ultimately meeting the Risen Lord, is able, with awe and wonder, to make the supreme Christian confession: 'My Lord and my God'.

We commonly think of ourselves as being far superior to such a tragic personality as Judas. But have we grounds for boasting? He stands as a terrible warning to us; and we must heed the warning. It is so easy for us to fall before the same temptations. How easy to be covetous! How easy to become the victim to selfish ambitions! And have we never been victims of jealousy?

These three sins, uniting in Judas, drove him to the act of infamy which has left his name as the most dishonoured in history. Yet these three sins are really one: in his inner life he gave precedence to himself. This is the essential nature of sin, in whatever guise it takes. In the Garden of Eden the sin of Adam and Eve was that they chose to go their own way rather than to obey the command of God. They were saying 'yes' to themselves and 'no' to God. And wherever sin is encountered its essential nature is always that 'yes' to selfish desire, with the inevitable corollary of 'no' to God. Here lies the test of our own discipleship. Someone has well said that if Jesus Christ is not Lord of all He is not Lord at all.
