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## Why Did Jesus Choose Judas?

by Rev. Jerry L. McGlone

### Mark 14:18-20

And as they were at table eating, Jesus said, *“Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me.”* They began to be sorrowful, and to say to him one after another, *“Is it I?”* He said to them, *“It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the dish with me.”*

**W**hy did Jesus choose Judas? Out of all the men in Israel, why did he choose Judas?

He must have known how it was going to turn out.

He must have seen those thirty pieces of silver glimmering out there in the future.

He must have felt a twinge on his cheek, knowing that a kiss was going to do him in.

He must have known. So, why did Jesus choose Judas?

It wasn't a spur of the moment decision.

Luke says, “[Jesus] went out to the mountain to pray; and all night he continued in prayer to God. And when it was day, he called his disciples...” [Luke 6:12-13] After a whole night of prayer and contemplation, Jesus chose Judas.

Mark says, “[Jesus] went up on the mountain, and called to him those whom he desired...” [Mark 3:13] And he desired Judas.

Explain it to me, please. Why did Jesus choose Judas, knowing that Judas was the one who was going to betray him?

Well, the answer that comes quickest to my mind; the easiest answer to that question is: somebody had to betray Jesus. That somebody just happened to be Judas.

Well, that's the first answer that comes to my mind, and it's my mother's fault. My mother was born and raised a Presbyterian. She was raised by a very strict grandmother who closely monitored church attendance. The little Presbyterian church mom and her grandmother attended in the village of Amesville, Ohio taught predestination. Everything in the world, they taught, was pre-ordained by God.

Mom learned that God had written out a script for her life, and all she could do was play her part. In the theology she was taught, there wasn't much room for free will.

Even after she met and married my father, even after she started attending the Disciples church in the city, even after she underwent believer's baptism by immersion and became a full-fledged member of the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ - she never turned her back on that idea of predestination.

It was something she taught me when dad was not around.

And so, according to that primitive, un-researched theology of predestination, there's only one answer to the question "Why did Jesus choose Judas, when Jesus must have know what Judas was going to do." The answer is: because that's the way it was supposed to be.

If you want to, you can look at Judas and picture him as the "designated betrayer" on the twelve-man team of disciples. From the beginning of time, Judas was predestined to turn Jesus in. Judas was chosen by a higher power to be a traitor.

Does that answer satisfy you? It means Jesus didn't have a choice when it came to choosing Judas. It means Judas didn't have a choice when it came time for the betrayal. There was no free will in the matter.

Does that answer satisfy you? I'm not satisfied by it any more. Let's take a second look at it.

The scripture says that Jesus chose those whom he "desired." [Mark 3:13] Do you think he desired to have a traitor among his disciples? Do you think he desired -

- to live and work beside,
- to teach and sleep next to,

- to eat all his meals and spend all his freed time with,
- do you think he desired to do all of that
- with a traitor by his side?

The scripture says that Jesus called those whom he desired. The truth is, the men he desired, the men he wanted, the men he chose, were not “safe” men.

Jesus did not call men who were flawless.

He did not call men who were tried and true.

He did not call me about whom there were no doubts.

Jesus called rough fellows,

uncut stones,

men not yet polished.

Jesus desired to have men around him who had great potential; and when Jesus looked at Judas, he saw that Judas was a man who had great potential. Jesus looked at Judas and the other eleven men he had chosen to be his disciples, and he saw that all twelve of them possessed the possibility to become great men.

They can be likened to the elderly woman who wanted to live in a particular retirement development. She wanted to live there because the people who lived there were very active. She wanted to be active. She wanted to be on the go. She wanted to be one of them.

When she filled out the application form, she was a little nervous. She wanted the people who would be doing the choosing to know that she was healthy enough to live there, that she would fit in, that she was their kind of woman. That probably explains why she wrote on the application where it asked for her ZIP: “I have a lot of zip for a woman my age!”

That’s exactly what Jesus wanted in his disciples. He wanted men who had zip. He wanted men who were daring. He wanted men who could take a risk. He wanted men who would dare to try the impossible.

Jesus chose men who had potential -

- potential for greatness,
- potential for success,
- potential to face defeat and death and come out smiling,
- potential to change the world.

When Jesus chose his disciples, he knew that along with their potential for success came the possibility for failure.

He did not choose “safe” men to be his disciples. The job ahead of them was too great to be safe. The mission was too important to play it safe. He desired to have men around him who had zip and potential, and he knew that either good or bad news could come out of them.

When Jesus looked at Judas, when Jesus desired to have Judas as his friend, when Jesus chose Judas - Jesus saw his potential for good.

When you look at Judas today, I imagine you don't see him as a man who brought healing and hope and encouragement to people - but he did! For almost all of the time he spent as a disciple, Judas was a star. He was so respected by the whole team of disciples that they made him their treasurer. They handed all their money over to Judas, because they trusted him one hundred per cent.

Remember, for most of the time he was with Jesus, Judas had victories and successes. He lived up to his potential for good. But somewhere along the way, something happened to him. Something was missing; something went wrong.

Luke wrote that Judas became a traitor [Luke 6:16]. He wasn't a traitor to begin with; somewhere along the way, he became one.

Think about that! At almost the very same moment

- when Simon Peter became the rock upon which the church would be built -
- when James and John became the sons of thunder in their enthusiasm for spreading the good news they knew in Jesus Christ -
- when Thomas became the victor over his own doubts -
- at the time when all those good things were happening to the other disciples,
- Judas became a traitor!

All the while Jesus watched with wonder, love, and compassion as the inner battles raged within each of his disciples. He saw Simon Peter battle his impetuosity. He watched as James and John subdued their pride and their tempers. He witnessed Thomas conquering his skepticism. He cheered as Nathaniel overcame his timidity.

And while all the rest of the disciples were fighting their own private battles, Judas was fighting his impatience. When his impatience won out, that was when Judas became a traitor.

Nothing has changed. It has been two thousand years, and nothing has changed. All the same inner battles that raged inside all twelve of those first disciples, all the same inner battles they sometimes won and sometimes lost - all those same battles rage and war inside of you, today.

Tonight, I call you to be honest with yourself. Dig deep down inside to your core of faith and hope. Take a good, long, honest look at the person you have become.

Are you comfortable with your level of righteousness?

Are you satisfied with your Christian commitment?

Are you happy with the witness you make in your every day living?

Just as those first disciples had their share of failures, so do you. There are some sins you have locked away in the closet of your soul. There are some defeats you're trying to overcome. There are some battles you have lost. You've given in to temptations. You've turned the wild side loose. You've turned away from the path of righteousness.

But it's not too late. You've still got this night.

Before you eat any of the bread that Jesus broke for you...

Before you drink from the cup he poured out for you...

Before you leave this room and walk out into the dark, cold night...

Before you go back to your home and snuggle up in front of your television set...

answer one question:

Do you feel any kinship at all with Judas?

Look deeply into your soul. Have you ever betrayed the best that was in you?

Jesus chose Judas. He chose Simon Peter and Andrew, James and John, and the rest. He knew there was that great unknown that comes with every choosing.

And then, one day, Jesus chose you. He called you to be his disciple. You heard his call. You answered his call. You became his latter day disciple.

But the very same unknowns that came with his first call to discipleship also come with his latest call to discipleship. There is no guarantee that things are going to work out the way Jesus wants them to. There is no assurance that you will live up to his expectations.

Jesus chose you. How will you turn out? What kind of disciple will you turn out to be?

There's no doubt about it -

- you will have your moments of betrayal,
- you will have your nights of despair,
- you will feel hurt and disappointed,
  - confused and abandoned,
- but, you will also have your victories and your joys,
  - your laughter and your faith,
  - your delight and your promise.

And in the end, when all things are done, you will have had your say. You will decide how things will turn out for you. You will do your own choosing. You will choose to be his disciple, or you will choose to be his betrayer.

Even after those thirty pieces of silver, even after that kiss of betrayal, even after breaking his master's heart; things could have been different for Judas. Even after all of that, he could have chosen a different way.

A group of visitors were being shown through a church. They had come to see the beautiful stained glass windows in the sanctuary. The guide explained each window. "Up front is the window to Jesus, and at the back is the window of creation. But my favorite windows," the guide said, "are the ones on the side, dedicated to the five Gospels."

"The window dedicated to St. Matthew shows Jesus preaching the Sermon on the Mount. The second is dedicated to St. Mark, and opposite it is the St. Luke window. Luke was a physician and so the window shows Jesus healing the sick.

"But this is my favorite window. It is dedicated to the Gospel of St. Judas. It shows a repentant sinner. You remember St. Judas' story, don't you," the guide asked. "Remember how he came forward unexpectedly at Jesus' trial, made a public affirmation of his faith, and offered to die in Jesus' place? They turned him down, of course, and Judas went on to write the fifth Gospel. It's the favorite Gospel for most folks because it emphasizes how people can start all over again - even after having made the biggest mistake in their lives."

You see. It could have been different for Judas. He could have chosen another way. So can you!

When Jesus first saw Judas, Jesus desired to call Judas his friend and disciple. Out of all the men he could have had, Jesus chose Judas. Jesus saw potential there. Even after that last kiss, think what Judas could have done with the rest of his life.

What can you do with the rest of your life?

It doesn't matter what you've done so far. Maybe you've been a scoundrel, a cheat, and a liar. Maybe you've made some big mistakes. Maybe you're carrying around a whole steamer-trunk-full load of sins. Maybe, so far, you haven't been worth a plug nickel.

Well, maybe, but all of that was yesterday. Right now, you've got today. You've got tonight. You've got this meal to eat and a savior to remember. You've probably got at least one tomorrow left.

So, what are you going to do with the rest of your life?

However long ago it happened, wherever it was - Jesus chose you. He desired to call you his friend. He wanted you to be his disciple. And no matter what might have happened up until now, he still sees the potential for good that's buried in your soul.

So, what are you going to do with the rest of your life?