



Judas and the Boundaries of Forgiveness

Session 4: Judas as Object of Sympathy

Super Wednesday Bible Study: 10/03/18

1. Brain Starter

The Return of the Prodigal Son by Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669)

2. Judas as "Tragic Hero"

- A tragic hero is "flawed in various ways and [suffers] a horrible death, but [is] still a hero with whom we identify and whose fate fills us with sympathy, admiration, and awe at our own vulnerability before the powerful forces of fate and God." *Paffenroth*, p. 59
- Examples: Willy Loman, Jay Gatsby, Severus Snape, Anakin Skywalker, David
- Might Judas be a Tragic Hero? There are many possibilities; we'll discuss these four:
 - Judas as Misunderstood Gnostic
 - Judas as Only Obedient Disciple
 - Judas as Revolutionary or Anti-Revolutionary
 - Judas as Lover

3. Judas as Misunderstood Gnostic

- Gnosticism is a generic term for a variety of religious movements of the first centuries of the Christian era. Although the theology, ritual practice, and ethics of these groups differed considerably, all purported to offer salvation from the oppressive bonds of material existence through *gnosis*, or "knowledge." *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, p. 380
- Classic Gnosticism takes a dim view of creation/flesh and generally holds that Jesus was pure spirit in the disguise of humanity. Gnosticism thus denies the creedal belief in Christ's two natures (truly man and truly God).
- Under the view of Judas as a Gnostic, under this view "Judas knew the real, heavenly reality that Jesus was not of the flesh, and he was just helping him to return to his spiritual, nonfleshly, heavenly home, thereby giving us a 'revelation of things above.'" *Paffenroth*, p. 61.
- A variation on this theme, is that the other disciples were too dumb to recognize who/what Jesus really was, so via the crucifixion Judas gave them a more spiritualized savior.
- The so-called "Gospel of Judas" exemplifies this view.
 - See <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5327692>

4. Judas as Only Obedient Disciple

- “Some have believed that Judas understood the necessity of Jesus’ suffering much more than did the other disciples, and he accepted Jesus’ commissioning of him to help enact that necessary though unpleasant goal...Viewed this way, it is [Judas’s] tragedy that he did everything out of love but has been remembered as the epitome of hate.” *Paffenroth, pp. 64, 69*

5. Judas as Revolutionary or Anti-Revolutionary

- **Revolutionary**

- “For at least the last 250 years, the most popular depiction of Judas has been that of a revolutionary and patriot who became disillusioned with Jesus’ otherworldliness and his refusal to lead the disciples and the rest of Israel in a violent uprising to cast off the yoke of Roman oppression and establish a real, worldly kingdom.” *Paffenroth, p. 82*
- Offers a psychologically plausible motive for the betrayal.
- Secularized version of a religious tale (easy for 21st century minds to grasp!)
- If Judas is a nationalistic revolutionary, we can see him as misguided but not malicious. Perhaps he, like the other disciples, tragically misread what it meant for Jesus to be a “messiah,” OR Judas is the disciple with the REAL vision who believes that Jesus is dragging his feet, and thinks that his arrest will be the spark that finally leads to revolution.

- **If Judas is an anti-revolutionary**

- Then Jesus is the one who “succumbed to temptation,” and therefore Judas is “a loyal Jew who seeks to discredit and disarm the dangerous and destructive Nazarene.” *Paffenroth, p. 92*

6. Judas as Lover

- “Depictions of Judas as a great lover can carry quite different emphases and conclusions. His love of women can drive him to betrayal, or despair, or heroic self-sacrifice.” *Paffenroth, p. 110*

7. An Eastern Orthodox View of Judas

- For the Son of God to save us out of the depths of our fallenness, He had to experience the fullness of human tragedy, including betrayal and abandonment on the part of those closest to Him. (“What is not assumed is not saved,” St Gregory Nazianzus would declare.) To become truly “what we are” required that Jesus experience not only physical pain and suffering, but the anguish of treachery as well.

8. Next Week: October 10

Judas as Object of Hope