

WAS JUDAS A TRAITOR?

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IT is very difficult to understand Judas Iscariot on the basis of the accounts of him in the New Testament. Even the writers of the Gospels, though they were not interested in psychological problems or in any history save that of the Master, were evidently perplexed at the conduct of Judas, and at a loss how to account for it. Luke gives striking expression to this perplexity, when he begins the account of Judas's bargaining to betray Jesus with these words (xxii. 3), "And Satan entered into Judas." Surely if demoniacal possession were credited at the present day, we should most certainly accept Luke's statement that an evil spirit entered into Judas Iscariot, as the only plausible explanation of the conduct that is charged against him. For the betrayal, according to all accounts in the Gospels, appears to be without any but a trivial and sordid motive, such as in modern times would incline us to think of Judas as a moral imbecile.

Again, we with the Gospel writers must be astonished at the sudden emergence of such baseness, the lack of development in disloyalty and treason. It was, according to Mark and Matthew, only two days at the utmost before the arrest of Jesus, when Judas went to the priests and bargained for his betrayal. There appears no evidence of his unfaithfulness prior to this time. Nor is any fault shown in his previous conduct and bearing, save in the Gospel according to John, where it is said (xii. 6), "He was a thief, and having the bag took away what was put therein." We must regard this statement with some doubt, owing to the silence of the other Gospels concerning it. But if Judas was an embezzler, or even a downright thief, there is a vast difference between such contemptible vices and what appears to be the basest, most pathetic treason known to history. Let us suppose that Judas betrayed his Master in order to avert the discovery of his thefts. Then he must have been a man

of such utter baseness of character that both Jesus and his fellow apostles would have seen through him long before this. John does indeed intimate that at least Jesus understood Judas perfectly (John vi. 70). Here however the author of the Fourth Gospel seems to be speaking as a theologian. But at all events, the apostles seem not to have discovered any serious fault in him before his great crime, save possibly petty thieving, and even this seems not to have been generally known among them. He must have appeared faithful to his Master in the many times of gloom and danger that the little company had experienced before this. When Jesus while still in Galilee told his disciples of the evil fate that would come upon him in Jerusalem, the disciples, it is said (Mark ix. 32), "understood not the saying, and were afraid to ask him," and (Matt. xvii. 23) "they were exceeding sorry." There is no hint that Judas was not amazed and saddened like the rest at the gloomy predictions of the Master. If he was at this time in his heart disloyal, or if he was a disciple of Jesus for selfish or unworthy reasons, would he not have deserted as soon as it appeared that his Master's course led to danger and ruin? So base a man as Judas appears on the face of the Gospel story to be, would desert Jesus, we should think, before he entered Jerusalem—especially if he had heard and believed the prediction that his Master would there encounter opposition culminating in disaster and death.

It is furthermore strange and almost incredible, that Jesus would choose among his twelve apostles a moral imbecile. Except in this instance, Jesus appears to have been a good judge of character. When questioned or addressed, even by strangers, he replies as much to the questioner as to the question. It is of course quite likely that this characteristic is exaggerated in the Gospels, for the happiest replies would be the best remembered. But there must at least have been a nucleus of fact within the exaggeration.

Significant too, in this connection, is the propensity of Jesus to nickname his apostles. He called one of them "Rock" (Peter)—probably with reference to his solidity of character and loyalty of spirit; and the epithet appears on the whole to have been well deserved. There were two others that he called "Sons of Thunder." It is evident then that Jesus paid particular attention to the peculiarities of his apostles. These twelve men were of his own free selection, apparently out of a much larger number of disciples (Mark iii. 13, 14). They must have seemed to Jesus just the sort of men he wanted for intimate and confidential relations with himself, and for the advancement of his cause. Why then would he choose one so base as the Judas

of these traditions, who would turn traitor for fifteen dollars or to cover up his pilfering? And if he made such a blunder at the start, why did he not, before it was too late, discover the true character of Judas Iscariot and expel him from the apostolic company?

While these difficulties confront us in the story as a whole, certain details in the evangelic versions of it are still more perplexing. In the first place, all the Gospels but Luke declare that at the Last Supper Jesus pointed out Judas as the man that should betray him. But if Jesus did actually designate the traitor, why was not Judas from that moment watched and prevented from leaving their company? Furthermore it is extremely difficult to conceive of Judas as proceeding any farther in his treacherous design, after he had been thus exposed. Superstitious fear if no other motive, would deter him, we should think.

But setting aside this designation of the traitor, we have the testimony of all four Gospels, that Jesus said at the Last Supper, "One of you shall betray me." If he did actually say these words, and if he meant them in the literal sense in which the Gospels interpret them, we should think he would take precautions against expected treachery. But it appears that he did not take precautions against treachery on the part of an apostle. Judas was apparently suffered to separate himself from the others. Then as he came with the soldiers, he knew just where to find Jesus. Now the most ordinary prudence would have prompted Jesus, if he suspected treachery, to change his camping place.

The Fourth Gospel meets these difficulties by the view that Jesus deliberately and consciously invited his fate. We are told in that Gospel, that Jesus knew the badness of Judas Iscariot very early—presumably at the time he chose him for an apostle. For the Master is declared to have said, "Did I not myself choose you, the twelve? and one of you is a devil" (John vi. 70). It is thus implied that Judas was chosen just because he was a bad man. And that Jesus sought his fate is indicated in these words: "I myself lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one took it away from me; but I myself lay it down of myself" (John x. 17, 18). In accordance with this conception that Jesus was inviting his fate, we are told that at the Supper he dismissed Judas with the enigmatic words, "What thou doest, do quickly" (John xiii. 27). And Jesus is represented as assisting, later on, at his own arrest. He goes forward to meet his captors, and announces to them that he is the one they are seeking (John xviii. 4-8). The traitorous kiss is wholly

omitted in this account, and it seems as if the traitor's part is superfluous under the circumstances.

But the Synoptic Gospels give us a different impression of the attitude of Jesus at this hour. They tell us that, instead of welcoming his fate, he prayed that, if it were possible in God's plan, he might be saved from it. It is reasonable to feel some doubt as to the literal accuracy of this statement, since it implies that Jesus prayed aloud and was overheard by his very drowsy companions. But this does not militate against the story's substantial truth as an expression of the feelings Jesus seemed to his disciples to show at this time. Indeed throughout the Supper and up to the time of his arrest, Jesus appears in the Synoptic accounts to be in great dejection of spirit; and this must have been indeed the case, because the tendency of the disciples would be to represent it otherwise.

It appears then, that the Gospel writers are themselves at a loss to understand the conduct of Judas in any sense that is consistent with the confidence Jesus bestowed upon him in choosing and retaining him as an apostle. If we would find a satisfactory solution of the problem, we must first sift the accounts of the betrayal, to determine what in them is most primitive, most essential, and most likely to be genuine reminiscence. First of all then, Matthew's story of the money transactions with the priests, the return of the bribe and the final bestowal of it (Matt. xxvi. 15, 16; xxvii. 3-10), must be rejected as unhistorical. All this is manifestly derived from a passage in Zechariah (xi. 12, 13). We may too, go farther to say that every story of a money consideration is probably pure invention. The disciples would never know what dealings Judas had with the priests. In fact, they could hardly know even that Judas had seen the priests.

We may consider too, as mere conjecture, the hint of a connection between the anointing at Bethany and the beginning of treachery on the part of Judas (Mark xiv. 3f.; John xii. 1f). Possibly, however, Judas may have been absent from the rest of the company for a while after this occurrence, and thus the rumor may have started.

The two stories of the death of Judas and purchase of the Field of Blood (Matt. xxvii. 5f.; Acts i. 18f.) are materially and hopelessly at variance, and are not mentioned in Mark or John. These stories may have arisen partly because of some purchase by the priests of a burying ground; partly because Judas from this time ceased to have any relations with the disciples and they did not know what became of him; in part again from the feeling that some

sudden and terrible death was due him for his crime. Furthermore, the story of the traitor Ahitophel's suicide by hanging (2 Sam. xvii. 23) is likely to be a source of Matthew's story of the similar suicide of the traitor Judas.

There remain the accounts of the betrayal itself, and of the prediction of it by Jesus at the Last Supper. It is possible that the historical kernel lies entirely in these predictions. That is to say, some dark hint of Jesus about possible treachery among his disciples, or of desertion in time of danger, may have given rise to this story that Judas Iscariot actually betrayed the Master. But this is only possible. All four Gospels and the Book of Acts concur in the testimony that Judas "was guide to them that took Jesus" (Acts i. 16). Here it would seem, if anywhere in the story, is genuine reminiscence. It would be more likely that the account of the predictions should be based on that of the betrayal, than that the predictions themselves should give rise to the story of the betrayal.

In the accounts of the betrayal, it is said that there came with Judas "a multitude with swords and staves." If it should present any difficulty, we may reasonably question the number; for in the darkness so few as a dozen or only half a dozen men might seem to the distracted disciples a crowd. It is declared in Mark and Matthew, that Judas came to Jesus, called him "Rabbi," and kissed him. Luke however is slightly at variance here, making it appear that Judas only tried to kiss Jesus, but was repelled by his Master's rebuke. But this difference in testimony is immaterial, except as an indication that here we have reminiscence rather than legend or baseless rumor. If the story of the betrayal were itself a legend, we might find a source for this detail of the kiss in the account of the assassination of Amasa by Joab (2. Sam. xx. 9f.). But if the story as a whole is true, we must accept the report that Judas actually did at least try to kiss Jesus. For the apostles could not fail to notice and remember how Judas greeted his Master and what signal, if any, he gave to the officers and soldiers; so that if the matter of the kiss were legendary, the true account would be found, besides the legend. As to the statement that Judas had told the men that accompanied him, "Whomsoever I shall kiss, that is he," this simply expresses what was inferred from the conduct of Judas at this time, and is therefore of no value as testimony.

We come now to the words at the Last Supper. The report that Jesus on this occasion predicted his betrayal by an apostle may be legendary, but it would seem on the whole more probable that he did say something of the sort. Concerning this Last Supper the

apostles must have retained very full memories, and the Synoptic accounts of what was said and done at that meal seem to be on the whole sober and reliable. But the actual words of Jesus were probably distorted in memory and tradition, to make them fit more closely the occurrences in Gethsemane. It is possible that he did not have in view any treachery on the part of an apostle, but such negligence, or cowardice, or blundering, as might cause his ruin. It may be significant that the Greek word (*παραδίδομι*) that is here translated "betray," does not primarily or necessarily signify an act of treachery. It means *deliver*, and there are places in the Gospels where it is so translated. Here then the saying may fitly be rendered, "One of you will cause me to be captured."

But the designation of Judas as the one that should cause his ruin, is probably an accretion to the original story. As Judas did the thing that Jesus feared or expected one of the twelve would do, it would quite naturally be said that Judas was pointed out as the one that would do it. Furthermore, the influence of a passage in the Old Testament is here apparent. "He that eateth with me" (Mark xiv. 18), and "He that dippeth with me in the dish" (Mark xiv. 20), are obviously taken from one of the psalms (xli. 9), as the Fourth Gospel clearly indicates (John xiii. 18).

The story then, stripped of exaggerations and accretions, is as follows. Jesus at the Last Supper said, "One of you will cause me to be captured," or something of similar import. A few hours later, Judas came with officers and soldiers of the priests, to Jesus in Gethsemane, called him "Rabbi," and kissed him or attempted to do so. The men then seized Jesus and took him away.

It will be convenient at this point to consider some theories of a general similarity of character, with regard to the plan and motives of Judas. In these it is held that he did betray Jesus, and that with deliberate intention, but that his purpose was not a selfish or malicious one, but rather friendly than hostile. It has for example been conjectured by De Quincey, that Judas committed this crime in order to precipitate a conflict, from which he trusted his Master would emerge triumphant. But it is difficult to reconcile this theory, or others involving deliberate intention but a friendly purpose, with the representations in the Gospels and Book of Acts, and absence throughout the New Testament of any hint to support such a view. For if the motive of Judas was friendly to his Master, he would, it seems almost certain, confide in one or more of his fellow apostles, hoping, and with good reason, to enlist their sympathy if not co-operation. Then through these disciples that had learned his true

purpose, a more charitable opinion of Judas would be perpetuated, perhaps alongside those we now find expressed in the Gospels. Substantially the same objection applies, though with less force, to the theory of Neander, that Judas sought through the betrayal to put his Master's Messianic claims to the test, thinking that if he was truly the Christ he would be rescued by angels, but if not, he deserved destruction. Judas in that case would be more secretive; but, conscious of his high purpose, he could hardly help giving to others of the apostles some hints of the questions and plans that were in his mind; and in these revelations they would have material for a more favorable interpretation of his conduct. All this would be especially true, if Judas felt confident that his Master would be vindicated by the test; but if on the other hand he had a strong suspicion that the result would prove Jesus to be an impostor, he would not greet him with a kiss.

What theories remain to be considered depend in part on the fact that Judas Iscariot was not like the other apostles a native of Galilee, but of Judæa. The most radical of these theories reduces the whole story of the betrayal to a legend. The original tradition, it is supposed, did not account for the ease with which Jesus was captured; so Christian ingenuity exerted itself to find an explanation. Some passages from the Old Testament (most of which have already been referred to in this paper) suggested details of the legend. We know that when Jesus was captured, his disciples "left him and fled" (Mark xiv. 50). Judas may then have returned to his home and never again joined the Galilæan disciples, so that the legend of the betrayal would be conveniently fixed upon him. (Cheyne in *Encyc. Bib.*) This theory could only be accepted as a last resort, so skeptical is it of the Gospel traditions. The accounts of the Last Supper and the night in Gethsemane—peculiarly memorable hours, since they were the last that Jesus spent with his disciples during his mortal life—would be strangely meager and incoherent, if all references to the betrayal were left out.

Another theory has been succinctly stated as follows: "In all probability Judas, being of the district of Judah, while the rest were all Galileans, was not impressed with the Messianic character claimed by Jesus, and therefore, merely to obtain immunity for himself, committed the cowardly act of betraying him to the officers and soldiers of the priests that came with swords and staves to seize him and his followers." (Kaufmann Kohler, Ph. D. in *Jewish Encyclopædia*). This theory, amplified and possibly modified to some slight degree, gives a simple and natural solution of most of the

difficulties. We may suppose that while he was in Galilee Judas did not seriously question the Messianic claims of Jesus, but was in every sense a loyal disciple. But now that he was in Jerusalem, he viewed matters once again through the Judean atmosphere that he had known in his early years, and it did not seem to him that Jesus answered the necessary conditions for the nation's Messiah. However, he did not look upon him as by any means an impostor, but still revered him as a wise and good religious teacher. The betrayal was not a deliberate act, and during the Last Supper Judas had no idea that he would ever be guilty of such conduct. But after the Supper, and while for some reason the poor man was alone, he was seized by soldiers of the temple guard, who threatened him and put him into a terrible fright, till he consented, on consideration of his own safety, to conduct them to the place where his Master was spending the night, and to point Jesus out to them.

This theory, though satisfactory in other respects, meets a difficulty in the kiss that Judas, when he came with the soldiers, gave to Jesus. A man that was frightened into betraying one he held in veneration, would hardly, we should think, do it with a kiss. It is however conceivable, that this salutation was an expression of his sorrow and compunction for his cowardly conduct. Nevertheless it was in effect a signal to the captors of Jesus, and it seems unlikely that Judas would use this salutation if he was a traitor against his wishes and through extreme fear.

To meet this difficulty a theory is now offered that differs from the one just considered, by regarding the act of Judas as a blunder rather than a crime. Jesus, as it appears from both Mark and John, had at former times found it necessary to go into hiding from his adversaries. But now he was in their very midst, and great circum-spection was necessary on his own part and that of his followers. Until perhaps two days before the Passover, Jesus resorted to the Temple courts, and taught. And in the very boldness of this act, in the publicity of it, there was at first a strange security. Jesus was getting the ear and sympathy of many of the people, and on this account the scribes and priests hardly dared molest him. But the danger of his situation was increasing; and it appears (especially from John xii. 36 and from Matt. xxii. 37f.) that Jesus abandoned the Temple courts a few days before the Passover, and kept himself in seclusion. It seems quite likely that he intended to repair to the Temple courts during Passover week, and there make a public and explicit avowal of his Messiahship. At least the priests and scribes must have suspected such a move on his part; and as the

Passover drew near, they must have become exceedingly anxious to get him out of the way. And Jesus for his part must have realized that his danger was increasing every day, especially at night. There are indications that he was taking special precautions at this time against being captured at night. After the Last Supper, and probably for a few nights before, he camped on the Mount of Olives, instead of lodging as he had formerly done at a house in Bethany. One motive for this change may have been to decrease the danger of surprise and arrest. He appears to have taken another precaution. The disciples were to watch, lest he be surprised.

During these days of seclusion, Jesus according to the Synoptic Gospels appears to have spoken at great length about his second coming to earth and the establishment of the Kingdom. It seems probable, however, that some of these sayings really referred to his own immediate danger and the likelihood of his capture in the night. The frequent references to the "hour" and to the "night" would be more natural in this sense, than with regard to his second coming. For example, the following has a far more natural sense when we have substituted the term *thief* for "Son of Man," and understand the saying as referring to a possible capture of Jesus in the night: "But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what watch the thief was coming, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken through. Therefore be ye also ready: for in an hour that ye think not the *thief* cometh" (Matt. xxiv. 43, 44). From this and other similar passages we may infer that Jesus instructed his disciples to be his body-guard and by turns keep watch through the night.

We come now to the words of Jesus at the Last Supper. It was more than likely that on that night the priests would endeavor to apprehend Jesus, since the day following would be a favorable time for him to go to the Temple and proclaim himself the Christ. Jesus, realizing the situation, was full of gloomy forebodings. The slightest carelessness or indiscretion on the part of the watchers, or of any of the apostles, might cause him to be surprised and seized. Was it not natural then, that prompted by his fears, he should exclaim, "One of you will cause me to be captured"? This saying and that about the denial may perhaps have come as one from the lips of Jesus, substantially as follows: "I solemnly warn you that this night, before cockerow some one of you may ruin and disown me."

The supper ended, the company repaired to Gethsemane, their camping place. Peter, James, and John are detailed to watch, but they fall asleep, "for their eyes were very heavy." They should

have intercepted any intruders that might come toward the Master; but by sleeping at their post they helped bring about his ruin.

Meanwhile Judas Iscariot, for a presumably proper reason, was tarrying in the city. If as the Fourth Gospel intimates, he was treasurer of the little company, he may then have remained behind to make some necessary purchases or to pay some bills. And we might conjecture that this office was entrusted to Judas just because he was a Judæan, and so could deal the better with the people of Jerusalem. But on the other hand his Judæan origin would make him somewhat reckless in his intercourse with the people of the city. His closer ties of tribal relation and of dialect would dispose him to friendship and familiarity with the Jerusalemites, whereas it would seem to him that the disciples and even Jesus were somewhat prejudiced against these people and inclined to be over-suspicious of their purposes. Furthermore it is possible that Judas in this Judæan atmosphere had come to have doubts whether Jesus answered the requirements of the nation's Messiah. At all events he would think somewhat differently from his Galilæan associates, and be inclined to set his own judgment against the cautions of his Master. So on this night, when two or three Jerusalemites come to him and ask that they may see and talk with the Rabbi, Judas assumes that their purpose is friendly, and so consents to be their guide. These men were, however, officers in disguise; and some soldiers were following them at such a distance that Judas would not observe them. On this Passover night, when so many were leaving the city for lodging places in the vicinity, a force of perhaps a dozen soldiers might easily be inconspicuous. Even when they were on the Mount of Olives and close to the spot where Jesus and the apostles were passing the night, they might be taken for a company of pilgrims going to their camp. But when Judas, still suspecting nothing, saluted his Master with a kiss, then we may think these soldiers rushed up at a signal from their leader, and seized their victim.

Against this theory an objection may be urged, which will now be considered. If Judas intended no wrong, his guilt was only similar to that of Peter, James, and John, who slept at their post. How then can we account for the apparently unanimous opinion of the disciples, that Judas was a malicious traitor, and on the other hand for the charity with which the negligence of these three was regarded? The answer is simple. Peter, James, and John brought forth works meet for repentance, and did what they could to atone for their negligence. But Judas, repairing in sorrow and remorse

to his home, missing the visions of the risen Master and therefore concluding that the work of Jesus was a failure, never rejoined the other disciples. Apparently disloyal, as they too would in all likelihood have been were it not for the new faith in the Resurrection, upon him was heaped their merciless judgment, notwithstanding the Master's precept, "Judge not." But must we also be uncharitable? The deed of Judas may, as has been suggested, have been due to cowardice, or it may have been an innocent mistake, but hardly at all events a deliberate crime.