



FROM ALL THE WAY UP TO ALL THE WAY DOWN

A friend of mine, Norman Martin, is writing his life story—to be published after his death. He calls it *From All the Way Down to All the Way Up*. The title of this sermon reverses Norman's order because it is appropriate for the subject of this presentation: Judas.

Most are familiar with Judas as being "all the way down." His treachery is one of the best known acts of infamy in the history of the world. He is arguably the best known of the Lord's apostles: There are those who can tell you about Judas' betrayal but would be unable to recite the names or accomplishments of any of the other apostles.

One reason Judas' act of treachery is prominent in our thinking is that the Gospel Accounts were written *after* Judas did the deed. When the writers mentioned Judas, they often identified him by that act (see John 6:71). For instance, Judas' name appears last in each list of the apostles, with these epitaphs fixed to his name: "the one who betrayed Him" (Matthew 10:4); "who betrayed Him" (Mark 3:19); "who became a traitor" (Luke 6:16). As a result, we have only negative thoughts when we hear his name. "Judas" was an honorable name in Bible times: One of Jesus' half-brothers had that name (Matthew 13:55), as did another of the apostles (Luke 6:16; John 14:22). Most of us today would not even name a dog "Judas."

There was, however, much more to Judas than one despicable deed. Clovis Chappell was right when he said that "in spite of the fact that we know the name of Judas so well, . . . we know Judas the man far too little."¹ To learn what God would have us learn from this man's tragedy, we need to see him not only "all the way down," but also "all the way up."

What if we could look through the pages of a photograph album² to see various moments in Judas' life?

ALL THE WAY UP

"A Devil" or "a Pawn"?

Before we look at photos of Judas on his good days, we need to rip from the album two caricatures³ fashioned by men. The first depicts Judas as "a devil from the beginning." This terminology is heard with some frequency,⁴ but the concept is not found in the Bible.

¹Clovis G. Chappell, *Meet These Men* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1956), 146.

²In the US, many people keep "photo albums," special books with blank pages in which photographs are placed. The analogy of photos displayed in a photo album is used throughout this sermon. Adapt this as needed for the society in which you live.

³A caricature is a drawing of a person in which his best-known features have been exaggerated.

⁴Among those who claim that Judas was "a devil from the beginning" are those who teach that a child of God cannot fall from grace. In other words, they claim that Judas did not "fall" because "from the beginning" he was "a devil." In truth, the case of Judas is just one of many biblical examples of people who sinned and fell from God's grace.

It is true that the Scriptures say that “Jesus knew from the beginning . . . who it was that would betray Him” (John 6:64). It is also true that the Lord called Judas “a devil” (John 6:70, 71).⁵ However, keep in mind two facts: (1) The statement about Christ’s foreknowledge focused on *all* who followed Him who would ultimately forsake Him; and (2) designating Judas “a devil” in John 6:64 is little different than calling Peter “Satan” in Matthew 16:23.⁶ In neither case was the Lord saying that these two men had *always* been personifications of the Evil One. Rather, His words were a vivid way of saying that they were allowing themselves to be used by Satan.

Rather than calling Judas “a devil from the beginning,” the Bible twice states that Satan “entered into” him (Luke 22:3; John 13:27)—surely an unnecessary action if Judas was already “a devil.” Also, consider this: Along with the other apostles, Judas cast out demons (Mark 6:7, 13)⁷; but Jesus stressed that demons were *not* cast out by the power of the devil, but by the power of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 12:22–29). Chappell pointed out that “nobody was ever a devil from the beginning, not even the Devil himself.”⁸

The other caricature to discard from the album is that of Judas being used as a pawn⁹ by God for His own purposes. Those who propose this often fasten on the fact that “Jesus knew from the beginning . . . who it was that would betray Him” (John 6:64). Look at the passage in its entirety: “But Jesus . . . said to them, ‘Does this cause you to stumble? . . . [T]here are some of you who do not believe.’ For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe,

⁵For the setting of John 6:64, 70, 71, see pages 12 through 15 in “The Life of Christ, 6.”

⁶For the setting of Matthew 16:23, see pages 48 through 50 in “The Life of Christ, 6.”

⁷There is no reason to believe that Judas was exempted from the gifts given to the Twelve—and every reason to believe that he was not exempted.

⁸Chappell, 148. For a brief discussion on the origin of Satan, see “Revelation, 6,” *Truth for Today* (July 1999): 37.

⁹The term “pawn” comes from the game of chess. The pawn is a small game piece with little value. A skilled player moves it as he wills in order to win the game. The piece is generally sacrificed (put where it can be captured) as part of the player’s strategy. Thus to be “a pawn” is to be used by someone and then discarded when you have served your purpose.

and who it was that would betray Him” (John 6:61, 64). The statement was directed to *all* who had been offended by His speech on the Bread of Life. It doubtless included Judas,¹⁰ but Christ had in mind many people, not just one.

Perhaps I need to make a few remarks on the fact that “Jesus knew from the beginning.” As human beings, we can never fully understand divine foreknowledge; but the Scriptures make clear that divine foreknowledge never negates free will and personal responsibility.¹¹ The following is a poor parallel, but is the best I can do: Even as my knowing about an event *after* it happened does not make me responsible for that act, even so God’s knowing about an event *before* it happened does not mean that He is to be held responsible. Adam Fahling wrote that the fact that Judas “became a traitor can no more be charged to Jesus than the denial of Peter, which Jesus also foreknew.”¹²

A Disciple with Potential

If Judas was not “a devil from the beginning” and not “God’s pawn,” what—or who—was he? He was *an apostle*, personally selected by the Lord (see John 6:70). The selection of the Twelve was not done casually, without serious thought. Jesus “spent the whole night in prayer to God” (Luke 6:12) before making His selection. The first picture in the photo album about Judas is one that depicts Christ smiling as He points to him, selecting him to be one of the Twelve.

Jesus did not select the apostles on the basis of their superior knowledge, previous accomplishments, or spiritual maturity—but on the basis of their *potential*. Jesus saw in unstable Simon the potential to be Peter the rock. The Lord saw in John, “a son of thunder” (see Mark 3:17), the potential to be “the apostle of love.”¹³ Even so, He saw in greedy, grasping Judas the potential to be someone special.

¹⁰In the Greek, the phrase “who . . . would betray Him” is singular, while the phrase “who . . . did not believe” is plural.

¹¹Later in this presentation, Scriptures will be given to show that Judas was held responsible for his actions.

¹²Adam Fahling, *The Life of Christ* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1936), 261.

¹³John is often referred to as “the apostle of love.” One reason is that he said so much about love in his epistles.

Some may object, “But Judas was overly ambitious.” True, but so were all the apostles (see Luke 22:24). Another may say, “But he had a wrong concept of the kingdom and how its establishment would benefit him personally.” True, but so did the other apostles (see Mark 10:37). I hear a final protest: “But Judas was weak!” All of the Twelve had their weaknesses, didn’t they? If you want to include pictures like these in the album, they will need to be group shots.¹⁴

Again, I assert that Judas was selected for his potential—for who he could become and what he could someday accomplish in the kingdom. The Lord “knew what rank weeds the soul of Judas might grow. He also knew that the same fertile soil was capable of producing the loveliest of flowers.”¹⁵ Since Judas did not fulfill that potential, we cannot be certain of all that the Lord saw in him, but the available information allows a few glimpses.

Many think that Judas was the sole Judean among the apostles.¹⁶ If this was the case, he was probably superior to the others in secular education and social skills. He must have been viewed as a man with common sense and integrity, for he was selected to be the treasurer for the group (see John 12:6), the one who purchased needed supplies. He evidently even had a reputation for compassion, for he had the responsibility for giving alms to the poor (see John 13:29). In the photo album about Judas, be sure to include a picture of him feeding a hungry child.

Judas was an apostle with a powerful ministry. Every indication is that he shared equally with the other apostles in the gifts and responsibilities bestowed by the Lord; we find no indication that he was exempted in any way. Peter later stated that “he was counted among us and received his share in this [apostolic] ministry” (Acts 1:17). The NIV has “he was one of our number.” Here are some candid shots of Judas when he was “up”:

¹⁴“A group shot” is a posed photograph of an entire group of people, such as everyone at a special function or everyone in a certain organization.

¹⁵Chappell, 151.

¹⁶The name “Iscariot” probably means “from Kerioth,” indicating that Judas was from that city, which was in Judea. Kerioth is mentioned in Joshua 15:25. Evidently, all the apostles except Judas were from Galilee.

PICTURE JUDAS . . .

- as he traveled with Jesus.
- as he sat with the other apostles, listening to Christ teach.
- as he was sent out by the Lord to teach and preach (see Mark 6:7; Matthew 10:6, 7).
- as he addressed a crowd of rapt listeners (see Mark 6:12). With Judas’ background and education, he may have been the most polished speaker of all the apostles.
- as he baptized a man who had responded to his teaching (see John 4:1, 2).
- as he healed a sick mother (see Matthew 10:1; Mark 6:13).
- as he cast a demon out of a tormented teenager (see Matthew 10:1; Mark 6:13).

Judas was a preacher, a baptizer, a miracle-worker! Jesus offered him friendship (see Matthew 26:50¹⁷) and promised him a throne if he continued to follow Him (see Matthew 19:28). That was the future which Judas could anticipate. Any way you look at it, he started out “all the way up”!

ALL THE WAY DOWN

With sadness, we turn the album pages to those which chronicle Judas’ descending steps until he ended “all the way down.”

“All the Way Down” Inwardly

We cannot be sure of every factor that contributed to his downward journey, but we can be confident of this: The apostle went “all the way down” *inwardly* long before it was apparent *outwardly*. In the upper room, when Jesus told His disciples, “one of you will betray Me” (Matthew 26:21; Mark 14:18; John 13:21), none of the other apostles pointed a finger at Judas and said, “He’s the one!” When the Lord singled out Judas (John 13:26), they did not understand (see John 13:28, 29). Even when Judas left to do his traitorous deeds, they still did not suspect him (John 13:27–29). As we read John 13:21–30, we get the

¹⁷For the context of Matthew 26:50, see page 7 in “The Life of Christ, 12.” Especially, read footnote 27.

impression that most, if not all, of the apostles thought the betrayer could be almost anyone other than Judas.

Many of us have been surprised by a fellow Christian who left the church, was unfaithful to his mate, or did something else unthinkable.¹⁸ Perhaps we have said, “He is the *last* person I would have expected to do that!” We need to understand that, though we were unaware of it, a process of spiritual deterioration had been going on in that individual’s *heart* for a long time. Such a process must have occurred in Judas.

What *did* bring about the inward change in Judas? As stated earlier, we cannot be sure of all the factors. The Scriptures indicate that Judas’ love for money was a major contributing factor (see John 12:6; Matthew 26:15). We noted earlier that Judas was evidently good at handling money. Those with such a gift must take care so that money does not become too important to them (see 1 Timothy 3:3; Hebrews 13:5).

At some point, Judas took his eyes off the spiritual and fastened them on the material. The process was probably so gradual that he was not even aware of it. At first, he may have “borrowed” a few shekels from the money bag, intending to replace them. Then he starting transferring a donation now and then to his own money bag (see John 12:6). In his own mind, perhaps he had a good “reason” for taking the coins. Maybe he believed that he deserved some “pay” for the extra responsibility he had shouldered. Gradually, his greediness grew until no act was too heinous if it put money in his sweaty palms—not even selling his Master (Matthew 26:15). Paul wrote that “the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil” (1 Timothy 6:10a). Examples of this truth abound.¹⁹ Those who investigate crimes say that greed ranks in the top three or four reasons for wrongdoing. An indispensable picture in this part of the album has to be one of Judas filching coins from the apostles’ money bag.

We see other photos in this section of the album. In one, Judas is looking jealously at Peter, James, and John. As a Judean, he probably thought himself better qualified than those

¹⁸Adapt this sentence to fit where you live.

¹⁹Give some examples to which your listeners can relate.

three—but they, not he, were in the favored inner circle (Matthew 17:1; Mark 5:37; 14:33). Resentment may have festered in his heart.

Another is a close-up of Judas’ face showing disappointment. All of the apostles had expected the Messiah’s kingdom to be an earthly, political institution—and all of them wanted the power and prestige of being one of the Messiah’s hand-picked men. It is possible, however, that Judas, with his fixation on material things, craved the pay-off more strongly than the rest. If so, he must have become increasingly disillusioned with what he saw happening. Instead of pursuing a course that would put Him on a throne, the Lord constantly antagonized the most powerful leaders in the nation.²⁰

On one occasion, when men were about to force kingship on Jesus, instead of graciously accepting, He fled (John 6:15).²¹ The following day, Christ referred to “some . . . who do not believe” (v. 64a), and the writer made the statement that “Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him” (v. 64b). Immediately after this, it is said that “many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore” (v. 66). Since the inspired writer seems to have included Judas in his overall remarks about this occasion (v. 64), this may well be the time when the apostle began his downward spiral.²² Judas continued to “walk” with Jesus *outwardly*, but not *inwardly*.

“All the Way Down” Outwardly

Now we see a montage²³ depicting Judas during the final week of Christ’s ministry. During those fateful days, Judas’ greed, jealousy, and disappointment reached their peak. Twice in the accounts of that week, it is stated that “Satan entered into” Judas (Luke 22:3; see John 13:27).²⁴ This was not demonic possession against the apostle’s will.²⁵ Rather, Judas’ weak-

²⁰Where I live, we would say that “it became increasingly clear to Judas that his agenda was different than that of Jesus.”

²¹See pages 10 and 11 in “The Life of Christ, 6.”

²²See pages 14 and 15 in “The Life of Christ, 6.”

²³A montage is a collection of many pictures displayed on a single surface to convey a central theme.

²⁴For comments on Luke 22:3 and John 13:27, see pages 17 and 29 in “The Life of Christ, 11.”

²⁵For an article on demons (including a brief dis-

I do not know where you are spiritually—all the way up, all the way down, or somewhere in between. If you are all the way up, thank God for His blessings and strive to stay there. If you are in between, thank God for His patience and resolve to do better. If you are all the way down, thank God for His mercy and return to Him at once! Judas refused to do so and broke God's heart (see Ezekiel 33:11). Come to the Lord today, and the angels will rejoice (Luke 15:10)!⁴²

NOTES

You may prefer to call this sermon "From the Heights to the Depths." Other possible titles include "Judas' Photo Album," "Better If Never Born," and "The Son of Perdition." Tommy South called his sermon on Judas "The Judas Potential"⁴³. Within each of us is the potential to betray the Lord, and we must guard against it.

FALLEN FAITH

"Although few people will ever plummet from such heights to such depths as did Judas, people of faith still fall today. Leaders sometimes fall after years of faithful and fruitful service to Christ. Even after effective preaching, some

⁴²When you use this sermon, you will want to tell your listeners how to become Christians (Mark 16:15, 16; Acts 2:36–38) and how erring Christians may be restored (Acts 8:22, 23; 1 John 1:9; James 5:16).

⁴³South's sermon appeared on pages 23 through 26 in the January 1991 issue of *Truth for Today*.

have abandoned their faith or have stumbled into sin and scandal.

"These tragedies most often deeply disturb people who have been taught by, baptized by and ministered to by such fallen servants. But it should not cause a person's faith in Christ to waver. Although men may change, our Savior remains the same (Hebrews 13:8). While it is possible to be misled or deceived by men, the truth of the Word of the Lord abides forever (1 Peter 1 :25).

"To Judas' credit, he apparently did not make disciples of his own. His ministry seems to have directed men and women to the Christ, rather than to himself. The record of Scripture reveals that when Judas fell, he fell alone. Tragically, this is not always the case when men fall today.

"Let us continue to fix our eyes firmly on Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). Such focus will enable our hope and confidence to weather the inevitable rise and fall of men."

"Judas' Obituary,"
Gospel Advocate (June 1997)
Tom Pyles

JUDAS, SON OF PERDITION

"Judas' character was not the natural evolution of his doom, but the reverse; his doom was the inevitable result of his perversity of heart."

"The Judas Potential,"
Truth for Today (January 1991)
Tommy South

The lessons on "Revelation" and the "Life of Christ" that are referenced in this article are not available on biblecourses.com, but are available in commentary form. Contact Truth for Today for more information.

©Copyright, 2003 by Truth for Today
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED