



Judas and the Boundaries of Forgiveness

Session 3: Judas as Object of Hatred

Super Wednesday Bible Study: 9/26/18

1. Brain Starter

Le Retour du fils prodigue by Michael Martin Drolling (1786-1851)

2. Judas in John's Gospel

- See John 6:70-71 and John 3:18
- What does this lead us to conclude about Judas? And what might this all say about the relationship of John's community with the Jewish leaders at the time this Gospel was being written?
- John invites us to broadly connect the "Jews" (really the Jewish leaders) and Judas. See, e.g., John 8:44.
- Consider the explicit naming of Judas in John 12:1-8. Compare with Mark 14:4-5 ("some") and Matt. 26:8-9 ("the disciples").
- Notice how the conflict between Jesus and evil is both cosmic and "empty and trivial." It is "both demonic and all too human."
- In the account of the Last Supper (John 13) note that no motive is listed for Judas. What parts indicate human betrayal, and which parts indicate satanic influence?
- The English translations show some anti-Judas bias as well. Παράδιδωμι is better translated as "handed over" than "betrayed." What difference do you hear in that word/translation choice?

3. Judas in Jesus's Final Prayer

- John 17:12 – NRSV speaks of "one destined to be lost." ESV is closer to Greek – "son of destruction."
- So does this mean that Judas did not belong to Jesus? Was he always a son of Satan?

4. The arrest of Jesus: Judas fades away.

- See John 18:1-6, 12. Notice: No Judas kiss in this scene (for John, darkness and light never mix or touch).

5. When Hatred of Judas becomes Anti-Semitism

- Defined as: "hostility toward or discrimination against Jews as a religious, ethnic, or racial group." (Merriam-Webster.com)
- Although anti-Semitism predates Christianity, the standard pagan accusations (barbaric due to circumcisions and aloof on account of dietary restrictions) expand to Jews being stereotyped as thieves, swindlers, or avaricious; this is the peculiar contribution of Christianity, and of the Gospel of John in particular. *Paffenroth*, p. 37
- Christian anti-Semitism was not a fringe movement. Luminaries like John Chrysostom (349-407) commonly used anti-Semitic language in

writings and sermons. Anti-Semitism was also perpetuated through medieval literature and the medieval "passion plays."

- What were you told about Jewish people as you were growing up?
- It persists in the 20th century, in explicit writings of respected theologians like Karl Barth, and in the notion (expressed by Dietrich Bonhoeffer) that Jews were of interest to Christians only insofar as they might be converted.

6. Luther and anti-Semitism

- Between his very *gentle* writing about Jews in 1523 and his very *bitter* writing in 1543, did Luther negatively evolve in his view about Jews?
- "A closer inspection of his utterances on the question throughout his career reveals that he was never so unambiguously positive toward them as a reading of his 1523 treatise in isolation would suggest...In short, the evidence indicates that the Luther of these earlier years shared to the full in the medieval prejudices against the Jews." *Luther's works*, vol. 47, p. 127
- "To be sure, one can speak of an intensification of anti-Jewish rhetoric toward the end of his life...but Luther's theological evaluation of Judaism and the Jewish people remains essentially unchanged from the earliest stages of his career...Contemporary Lutheran Christians, and indeed any Christian who has been positively affected by Luther's courageous articulation of the gospel, have a moral obligation to reckon with how Luther sounded – and sounds – to Jewish ears." Rev. Dr. Brooks Schramm, *Martin Luther, the Bible, and the Jewish People*.

7. Conclusion

- "The villainous and usually anti-Semitic depictions of Judas...are perhaps most interesting for the interplay they show between culture and story. On the one hand, the author of the Gospel of John created his story partly in response to cultural influence of his time, as he wrestled with the painful rejection of Jesus by Jews, and the subsequent persecution of Christians by Jews. But his story then greatly shaped a Christian culture that became the dominant culture of Europe and the Americas, and everywhere it spread, it brought along John's violently anti-Semitic message. But along the way, anti-Semitic images that had nothing to do with John's Gospel could infiltrate and shape how the Gospel story was presented and interpreted. Nowhere has the Gospel simply caused anti-Semitism, but nowhere has the Gospel not at least contributed to it. At the same time, nowhere in the world has the Gospel message simply been a transparent reflection of the culture's prejudices and values, but nowhere has the Gospel not been influenced by these forces." *Paffenroth*, pp. 32-33

8. Next Week: October 3

Judas as Object of Admiration and Sympathy