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## **Judas and Jesus**

**Mary of Magdala reflects on Judas' betrayal  
based on John 13:21-30  
by Ralph Milton**

### *A soliloquy*

They were so alike and so different. Jesus and Judas.

I remember one evening particularly. I could hear them talking, long after all the rest of us had gone to bed. It wasn't an argument. At least they weren't angry although they disagreed. From the sound of their voices, I could tell they liked and respected each other.

"It is written in the book of Samuel," Judas was saying, "that the Messiah shall reign over Israel. 'You shall save them from the hand of the enemy,' as it is written. It is clear that the promised one will come and liberate us from the yoke of Rome. And that won't happen with polite words and fine speeches, Jesus. The Romans only understand one language, and that's the sharp edge of a sword."

"To trade one yoke for another is not liberation, Judas. We can only be free when the strong become the servant of the weak. The prophet Isaiah speaks of the Messiah as a 'suffering servant,' one who comes to share our pain and struggle. As long as we have earthly rulers to bow down to, whether that be a Roman governor, or a High Priest, or a military Messiah, as long as we are bowing down, we are not free."

And so the conversation went, back and forth. I was afraid it might break into anger, but it never happened. They enjoyed themselves, those two men with the fire in their eyes. They honed their wisdom on each other's intellect.

The other followers of Jesus didn't always like Judas. Some were jealous of the lively, long discussions the two men had – discussions most of us could only vaguely follow, and always about the expected Messiah, and what this Messiah would be like.

I introduced them, Judas and Jesus. Judas had been there in the crowd in Galilee not far from my home in Magdala. "Who is this man?" Judas asked me. I could tell immediately from his accent that he was not a Galilean. He was from Judah.

"You're rather far from home," I said.

"The rabbi's reputation extends to Judah and into Jerusalem," said Judas. "That's why I came here to see for myself. There are rumors about him. Who is he?"

"He is Jesus bar Joseph. From Nazareth."

“I know that,” Judas said with mild exasperation. “But who is he?”

“He is a rabbi, as you said. He is a teacher. He tells stories. I am one of his disciples.”

“He allows women as disciples?”

“Would you like to meet him?” I asked.

And that is how I came to introduce Judas of Kerioth to Jesus of Nazareth. And oh how I sometimes regret that, and yet I don’t think things would have turned out differently if I hadn’t. Because Jesus used Judas to find out who *he* was. It was in those late-night discussions – arguments sometimes, that Jesus discovered his calling. I think Jesus needed Judas, somehow.

It seemed to come to a head one day while we were walking toward Caesarea Philippi. Jesus was walking with Peter on one side and Judas on the other. “So,” said Jesus in a loud voice so that all of us could hear. “Who do people say that I am?”

“John the Baptist,” said Andrew.

“Well, I said, “I’ve heard people call you Elijah!”

“Fine,” said Jesus. “Who do *you* say that I am?”

I was walking where I could see Judas’ face very clearly. His eyes opened wide, and he turned his head sharply, as Jesus asked the question.

Then Peter blurted out, “You are the Messiah!”

Everyone stopped and looked at Jesus. “Don’t you tell anyone,” said Jesus. “You keep that insight to yourself.” And Jesus started walking again. But not Judas. He stood there as if he’d been nailed to the ground.

I could hear Jesus talking to Peter, explaining that this did not mean he was going to raise an army and fight the Romans. “The Messiah will suffer. And die. That is my calling. That is my destiny.”

“No Jesus!” said Peter. “That will not happen. If you won’t raise an army to defend yourself, we will!”

“Get behind me, Satan!” Jesus spat out the words with a fury I’d never seen before. “Get behind me, Satan. You have your mind on a human plan, but I am working under God’s direction.”

You could have cut the silence with a knife after that. Nobody said a word for a couple of hours. And that night, far into the night, I could hear Judas and Jesus talking to each other. Only this time the tone was different. The voices were subdued but intense. They never raised their voices and I could not hear any words. But I could hear in their voices, passion, pleading, despair, anger, and sometimes hope. Far into the night they talked until I finally drifted into a troubled sleep.

They didn’t talk much after that – Jesus and Judas. Just short, intense and very private conversations from time to time. But we started on that last trip to Jerusalem, and I could see the fire and the passion in their eyes. They were so alike, those two.

I never knew what their short, intense conversations were about. I could tell from their faces there was a tension that was never resolved. Once I saw Jesus put his arm around Judas, and then he rubbed his back gently as he withdrew it. It seemed a gesture of both love and desperation.

And I saw that love and fear and despair in their eyes the evening we gathered to celebrate the Passover. I was lying on the couch on one side of Jesus. Judas was on the couch on the other side. It had been an emotional evening. Jesus had insisted on washing our feet, even though Peter and others objected. I think it was meant to teach us what Jesus had been saying all the time.

“I am among you as one that serves,” he said. “The greatest one must be the servant of everyone. Masters are not greater than their servants,” said Jesus.

Judas allowed Jesus to wash his feet, but his face was expressionless, and I could see Jesus looking intently into his eyes.

And then as we were eating, Jesus, almost in tears said, “I don’t know how to tell you this, but one of you is going to betray me.”

There was a stunned silence. I was so close to Jesus, I could whisper in his ear. “Who?” I asked.

“The one to whom I will give this piece of bread,” Jesus whispered to me.

Jesus was always a man of compassion and love, but I have never seen such compassion and love in his eyes as I did that moment, when he gently took a piece of bread, dipped it in the wine, and gave it to Judas. “You have to do what you have to do, Judas,” he whispered. “Please do it quickly.”

It’s only now, years later that I am beginning to understand. It is only now, that I can get beyond my anger at Judas for what he did that night. For 20 pieces of silver, he betrayed Jesus! And all of us disciples have said terrible things about him, but, you know, Judas has never had a chance to tell us his story.

And you know what I now think? Now that I’ve had a chance to get beyond my anger?

I think Jesus loved Judas at least as much as – maybe even more than – all the other disciples. Judas was not an evil man. Judas was a good man who misunderstood.

**Ralph Milton has written a number of books,  
all of them available through Wood Lake Publishing.**

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