

THE CHARACTERIZATION OF A FALSE DISCIPLE:
JUDAS ISCARIOT IN MARK'S GOSPEL

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Even a first-time reader of the Gospel of Mark would quickly recognize that Judas Iscariot plays an important, albeit quite sinister, role in the book. In fact, before the original recipients of the Gospel had made their way to 3:19, where Judas is introduced and described as the one “who betrayed him,” they no doubt would already have been aware of this reality. In 1 Cor 11:23, Paul explains that the Eucharist was inaugurated “the night he [the Lord Jesus] was betrayed.”¹ So evil were Judas’s actions that they were memorialized, not only in the Gospels, but also in the early church kerygma and oral tradition.² Yet Mark³ is not content to allow oral tradition alone to shape his audience’s view of Judas’s character. This article will examine

1. Although there is some debate about how *παρέδιδετο* in 11:23 should be translated, “betrayed” seems the most likely. The language in 11:23 is so similar to Mark 3:19 (and Matt 10:4; Luke 22:4) that it would appear evident that the usage by both the authors of the Synoptic Gospels and Paul are one and the same. Both are likely relying on some form of oral tradition, hence Paul’s “What I have received” language. Some disagree, arguing that since the verb is also found in Isa 53:6, 12 in the LXX, meaning “handed over,” this is the best translation. For a discussion on this, see, Fee, *First Corinthians*, 549; Ciampa and Rosner, *First Corinthians*, 349; Theiselton, *First Corinthians*, 869.

2. Cf. Guelich, who, despite similar wording in each of the Synoptics, and the mention of the betrayal by Paul in 1 Corininthians, still views the words “who also betrayed him” as a Markan redaction. Guelich, *Mark 1—8:26*. First Corinthians 11:23 also serves to demonstrate Jesus’ generosity and forgiveness. It was on “the night he was betrayed” that he gave thanks and introduced the covenant!

3. For simplicity, the name “Mark” will be used for the author of the Gospel that has been assigned to his name.

the manner in which Mark shapes his narrative to highlight and draw attention to the true heinousness of Judas's actions and character. It will be argued that Judas is characterized in a consistently negative fashion and that through the use of rhetorical devices, setting, and irony, Mark accomplishes this with surprising literary finesse. This study argues that through the use of contrast—first between Judas and Jesus, and second between Judas and the other disciples—Mark presents his vision of the nature of true, authentic discipleship. In the end, a number of important questions about what it means to be a “disciple” and who can be one, are answered.

The overall approach of this article is firmly located within the discipline now known as narrative criticism.⁴ Such an approach as this supposes a high level of coherence for the book of Mark. More than a patchwork of different traditions, clumsily spliced together by a heavy-handed redactor, Mark can be demonstrated to be a rather sophisticated literary work worthy of being approached as consistent and coherent. Since we wish to highlight the *literary* prowess of the author, this approach does not stray from the finished text of the book itself into the other Gospels. Much important historical information about Judas can, no doubt, be found in the other Gospels,⁵ but more than just a work of history, Mark is a work of literature and, as such, must be appreciated for its own merits and thus will be examined on its own. This is a study of how *Mark* characterizes Judas, not a historical biography of the infamous betrayer. A study such as this agrees that “[P]articipation in the *form* is itself an essential part of the reading of a literary work.”⁶ Thus, appreciation for the aesthetic, or form, of Mark's work is the center of our study.

4. For an introduction to narrative criticism, see: Beardslee, *Literary Criticism*; Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism*; Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*.

5. For example, Matt 27:3–10 describes Judas's quasi-repentance and subsequent suicide. Luke 22:3 refers to the role of satanic possession in the betrayal. John 12:4–8 discusses Judas's thievery and motivation for betraying Jesus. For a short discussion on the historicity of Judas, see Collins, *Mark*, 224. For book length treatments and a reinterpretation of Judas Iscariot, see Klassen, *Judas*; Paffenroth, *Judas*.

6. Beardslee, *Literary Criticism*, 2.

The essential question is not *what* Mark is saying about Judas, but rather *how* he is saying it.

Literary and biblical scholars note that characterization occurs primarily through two techniques: “telling” and “showing.”⁷ To put it simply, “telling” occurs when the narrator (in this instance, Mark, the omniscient narrator)⁸ informs the reader of specific reality. The narrator is unbound by time or space and has unfettered access to the inner thoughts and emotions of characters. Likewise, “showing” occurs when the narrator presents the reader with the actions, words, and thoughts of a character. The “showing” dimension is linked with the literary device of plot and setting. Because Judas is only mentioned a few times in the Gospel of Mark, the narrator must go beyond “showing” and give asides directly relating to Judas’s character. Unless the story is to be stretched and lengthened, the only way for information about Judas to be communicated is through direct statements from the narrator.⁹ The relatively sparse mention of Judas makes it necessary for the narrator to “step in” and simply tell the reader details about Judas. These two dimensions of characterization are used by Mark to portray Judas in a specific way.

Having noted some of the preliminary considerations of a narrative-critical approach to characterization, we now turn our attention to the book of Mark. Each instance in which Judas is mentioned or featured in the Gospel will be addressed.

A Traitor in the Midst: Selecting the Twelve (Mark 3:19)

Much has been written about the selection of the Twelve and the theological significance of the “mountain” setting in chapter 3.¹⁰

7. Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism*, 52; Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, 126–30; Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 116–17; Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 3–20; Beardslee, *Literary Criticism*, 3–9; Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 98–99.

8. Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 40.

9. Booth, *Rhetoric of Fiction*, 11–13.

10. Gundry, *Mark*, 163; Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 262–68; Witherington, *Gospel of Mark*, 150. Cf. Guelich, *Mark 1–8:26*, 156, who argues against any type of theological motif present in the mountain scene.

What is significant for our study, however, is the reference to Judas in v. 19. Mark informs the reader that Jesus called to himself, “those whom he himself desired.”¹¹ The intensive “himself” (αὐτός) only serves to emphasize that this was Jesus’ own sovereign choice. Further, Jesus selected the ones he “*wanted*.” Jesus’ selection of the Twelve includes their being “with him,” and “sent” by him, and given authority to perform exorcisms. The language here is powerful. These are *his* chosen disciples, the ones called to be “with” him. The wording demonstrates the privileged position these disciples were called to participate in, and the deep level of intimacy that Jesus welcomed them into.¹² The semantic identification and alignment of the Twelve with Jesus has been demonstrated by Paul Danove.¹³ His important study, highlighting the links between the commissioning of the Twelve and Jesus’ own mission, demonstrates the heightened identification of the Twelve with Jesus himself. Thus, the words “who betrayed him” (3:19) sting all the more.

Even before this point in the narrative, Mark has already alerted the reader that an evil plot is afoot. In 3:6 the reader is told that the Pharisees have had enough of Jesus and are plotting with the Herodians to kill him. Here we have not only one but two groups conspiring against Jesus. In many senses, this is not a fair fight—two groups of prestigious, powerful individuals conspiring against a lowly carpenter from Galilee. However, with the introduction of the Twelve, the odds seem to come close to being balanced. Jesus now has his own team; his own source of support. Yet, even in this leveling of the playing field, the reader’s confidence is dashed with the final name in the list of the Twelve. Judas is listed last, and this aside is offered: “who also betrayed him.” For the reader, being aware that a plot has been hatched by two powerful groups hoping to kill Jesus, and then being informed that Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, is going to betray Jesus, proves to be a powerful prolepsis, building

11. Unless otherwise stated, translation is my own.

12. See Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 269, who believes that the language used by Mark here is illustrative of the totality of the Christian experience.

13. Danove, *Rhetoric*, 105.

tension and foreshadowing disaster in the future. The reader knows that there are people out to get Jesus, and they now know that, even within the intimacy of the Twelve, a conspirator is present.

Mark uses nicknames as a way of illuminating the relationships characters have with Jesus. For example, whereas Simon is given the nickname “Peter,” Judas is given the nickname “Betrayer.” In fact, Judas is referred to as “the Betrayer” (ὁ παραδιδούς) more often than he is referred to as “Judas” in the book of Mark.¹⁴ Additionally, in the list of the Twelve, the only one who has an action mentioned about him is Judas, who will betray.

Compare the manner in which Jesus is introduced to the reader to the way that Judas is introduced. Jesus is the “Christ, the Son of God” (1:1), most often the “Son of Man” (2:10) while Judas Iscariot is “the one who betrayed him” (3:19). Their respective introductions and first mentions in the Gospel of Mark are worth noting. As explained by Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, “by the time Jesus first speaks, the reader accepts him as a reliable character and is ready to hear and trust what he says.”¹⁵ In much the same way, whatever Judas does, says, or thinks from this point on is colored by the revelation of the narrator in 3:19 that he is the Betrayer.

The author of Mark has set the scene. By presenting first the plot by the Pharisees and Herodians to kill Jesus, and then introducing the Twelve, with Judas mentioned last and described as “the Betrayer,” the future looks grim. The irony of the situation is striking, as one of those hand-selected by Jesus for a special mission and privileged relationship is in fact the Betrayer.

This irony is increased when we reflect on the fact that loyalty plays a significant role in Mark’s depiction of discipleship.¹⁶ The disciples are initially portrayed as leaving behind their

14. Cf. “betrayer” (8 times): 3:19; 14:10, 11, 18, 21, 41, 42, 44; with “Judas” (3 times): 3:19; 14:10, 43.

15. Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 44.

16. Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark*, 8. See also: Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 124.

former life to follow Jesus (1:16–20; 3:13–16). Throughout the narrative, they follow, learn from, and even obey Jesus (10:1–7; 14:22–25). Yet through this, the disciples continue to be torn. They are “loyal” yet still remain unable to understand the parables that Jesus teaches (4:13), and are shown to be lacking faith (4:40). Throughout Mark, discipleship is shown to be a difficult path.

At this point in Mark’s narrative, it is unclear whether Judas is hatching evil intentions in his heart yet. All we are told is that this man *will* betray Jesus. However, the literary effect of noting Judas’s betrayal at this point serves to color every subsequent instance where Judas is mentioned, either individually or as a member of the Twelve.¹⁷ The characters in the story are unaware at this point about Judas’s impending act of betrayal. By giving the reader this privileged information beforehand, the narrator provides the reader with the necessary foundation of mistrust with which to engage the character of Judas in his Gospel. Whereas, throughout the Gospel of Mark, we see the disciples continually struggle with loyalty and the path of discipleship, Judas is not portrayed as being full of internal struggle, vacillating between betraying Jesus and remaining loyal. While Peter, for example, is a “round” character in the book of Mark, developing from spokesman of the group, to brave confessor of Christ’s messiahship, to one who denies Jesus yet is restored (16:7), Judas on the other hand is a “flat” character.¹⁸ He does

17. In fact, the name Judas, as noted by Collins, is the Greek form of the Old Testament name Judah (Hebrew: יהודה), an individual who likewise betrayed an innocent party. See Collins, *Mark*, 223.

18. The designation of Judas as a “flat” character does not indicate that he is a “simple” character or that he is obscure in the Gospel. Rather, from the beginning of the Gospel until the end, Judas is “the Betrayer.” He does not change, vacillate, or go against this title in anyway. This is what is meant by the term “flat” character. For a discussion on the difference between “round” or “flat” characters, see Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, 78; Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, 123–26.

not change, evolve or develop in Mark. From beginning to end of the Gospel, Judas is the Betrayer.¹⁹

A Plot Is Hatched: Judas Agrees to Betray Jesus (Mark 14:10)

Although the secret plot (3:6) and identity of “the one who betrayed him” (3:19) is revealed to the reader early in the book, Judas is not referred to again until 14:10. In between, there are a number of references to “the Twelve.”²⁰ In each of these instances, the reader already knows that no matter what ministry, healing, or exorcisms the Twelve are involved in, there is still a traitor in their midst. Lest the reader become complacent about the earlier mentioned threats against Jesus, and begin to forget the evil act that will at some point be perpetrated by Judas, Mark continues to remind the readers of Jesus’ impending death (8:31–38; 9:30–32; 10:32–34). Although the narrative between 3:19 and 14:10 features a host of wonderful, exciting events, Mark will not allow his reader to ignore the shadow that he has cast over the story by his remark in 3:19. The Betrayer has yet to act, but the time is coming when he will. Judas is “seeking” an opportunity to betray Jesus (14:11). The literary significance of the word “seek” (ἐζήτει) is also well documented by Danove.²¹ His work demonstrates that Mark uses this word to characterize certain groups in very significant ways. For example, the word is used in 3:32; 8:11, 12; 11:18; 12:12; 14:1, 55 to describe a negative action. The Pharisees are “seeking to destroy” Jesus. An evil generation “seeks” a sign. Only in 16:6 is this pattern broken

19. It is worth noting that Judas is unique in the Gospel of Mark in that his trajectory does not at any point change. Paul Achtemeier notes, “If there is any progression in the picture Mark paints of the disciples, it appears to be from bad to worse” (as quoted in Black, *Disciples*, 43). To a limited degree, it is true that the disciples go “from bad to worse” (although I would hasten to add, “and then good again” seeing as Peter is semi-restored at the end of Mark, see Mark 14:72; 16:7), but this is not the case with Judas. He is a simple, flat, and constantly evil character in Mark’s Gospel.

20. There are eight in total between 3:19 and 14:10: 4:10; 5:42; 6:7, 43; 8:19; 9:35; 10:32; 11:11.

21. Danove, “Narrative Rhetoric,” 22. See also Greeven, “ζητέω.”

when an angel says, “You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified; he is raised!”

The verses surrounding 14:10–11 provide one of the most forceful displays of the use of contrast in the book of Mark.²² In this passage Judas is contrasted with the unnamed woman who anoints Jesus at the home of Simon the Leper (14:1–9) and again, with Jesus himself (14:12–25) at the Last Supper. It is a contrast between the acts of humility performed by both the woman and Jesus, and Judas’s selfish ambition in choosing to betray Jesus for money.

The woman comes with an alabaster jar of “expensive perfume” and pours the perfume on Jesus’ head. Although this woman is named in other Gospels, Mark’s refusal to do so here may be part of his literary technique. By allowing the woman to go unnamed, he highlights her lack of previous relational familiarity with Jesus. By all accounts, she is a stranger. In fact, she is almost in the exact opposite situation to that of Judas. Judas is one of the Twelve. He is close, intimate, and familiar with Jesus. This woman, however, has no previous relationship with Jesus as far as we know. Yet their actions could not be more dramatically different. The woman who is unnamed is the one who responds to Jesus properly. She is the one who gives a most expensive gift to anoint her Savior. Judas, the one who should do such things, instead goes out after this event, seeks out the “enemy” Chief Priests, and agrees to betray Jesus for an unspecified amount of money. The woman gives up financial gain to honor Jesus. Judas betrays him for financial gain. The contrast presented here between the actions of the woman and Judas is dramatic.

Further, unlike in 3:19, the Betrayer here is referred to as “Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve.” By highlighting his intimate relationship with Jesus (as one of the selected few in the Twelve) right in the act of agreeing to betray Jesus, Mark draws special attention to the stark depravity displayed by Judas. The Greek underlying this verse strengthens the point at hand. The first two

22. Some additional examples of the use of comparison and contrast in the book of Mark are noted by Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 102.

clauses of 14:10 say, “And Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve.” In Greek, “the one of the Twelve” is a phrase used only once in the New Testament (ὁ εἰς τῶν δώδεκα). It is rather awkward in Greek, but through the use of the article Mark leaves no doubt that this Judas is one of “the” Twelve, the group introduced earlier.²³

The contrast does not end there. The two verses that speak about Judas’s arrangement to betray Jesus are sandwiched between the Anointing at Bethany and the Last Supper. The Last Supper is used by Mark to continue the contrast. Here, Judas is contrasted with Jesus himself. Jesus, while reclining and eating with his disciples, institutes the Eucharist, which, by its very nature, is an astonishing act of humility. Jesus offers his own body and blood to be “poured out for many.”²⁴ His death is not for his own purposes, but is actually *for* others. This scene foretells a beautiful act of humility. Compare this with Judas’s actions. Judas betrays his teacher and mentor for monetary gain, while Jesus speaks of offering his life for others.

- A) Jesus reclining at a meal (14:3)
- B) Woman, in humility, gives gift of great value (14:3b)
- C) Jesus: “This act of hers will always be remembered” (14:9)
- D) Judas, out of selfishness, betrays for money (14:10, 11)
- A) Jesus reclining at a meal (14:18)
- B) Jesus, in humility, gives gift of great value (14:22–25)
- C) Jesus: “Better for this man to have never been born” (14:21)

Although the sequence of events is not exactly the same, the parallels between these two episodes (Anointing and Last Supper) are hard to miss. The wording of v. 20 further demonstrates the magnitude of Judas actions. While eating and reclining with the Twelve—an intimate act with his closest friends—Jesus brings up the reality that one of those with him in the room will betray him. On this important Jewish holiday (v. 12), amidst the institution of the New Covenant, and while continuing to be

23. Evans, *Mark 8:27—16:20*, 365; Marcus, *Mark 8–16*, 937.

24. The allusion here to the Suffering Servant of Isa 53:6, 12, only serves to heighten the contrast between Jesus and Judas. See the remarks of Collins, *Mark*, 644.

reminded of Jesus' sacrificial death, the reader is brought face to face yet again with the Betrayer. The author highlights this reality through repetition of the word, "eating," thus highlighting the intimate nature of scene. The act of betrayal is birthed, not in a busy market place, nor in an impersonal context; its genesis is in a place of intimate relational and familial significance.

In these passages, the themes of self-sacrifice and service for others are presented as the *sine qua non* of discipleship. The unnamed woman models a disciple's heart in giving a costly gift in service to Jesus. Jesus does the same in offering himself up to institute the New Covenant. This is the heart of discipleship. Judas, on the other hand, is presented as functioning according to an opposite set of principles that have no room for loyalty or sacrifice.

Further, here Mark has Jesus pronounce what is, for all intents and purposes, a curse on Judas: "It is better that he had never been born." Since, in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is absolutely unified with God's agenda and perspective, his word is equal to God's word.²⁵ The point of view offered by Jesus must be trusted and respected, because in Mark, Jesus is the only individual (along with John the Baptizer) who acts and speaks in accordance with God's point of view, and God's point of view, in the Gospel of Mark, is always the correct one. This creative use of point of view and Jesus' voice serves to build even more antipathy towards Judas. Here, the beloved protagonist of the story, the very Son of God (1:1) pronounces this judgment on Judas. The reader is compelled to adopt the view Jesus presents.

Additionally, the significance of the setting of this scene should not be missed. The setting of the Last Supper takes place in both religious and social realms and plays an essential role in the plot.²⁶ It has religious significance because, on a day to commemorate Yahweh's deliverance from bondage in Egypt, Judas is about to betray Yahweh's Anointed One into evil men's hands.²⁷ The social setting highlights the irony of the scene: the

25. Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism*, 54.

26. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, 87.

27. On the role of religiously significant settings, see *ibid.*, 113.

first time in the Gospel that Jesus is pictured at a meal (3:15, 16), the Pharisees are angry that he is eating with sinners. Now, when he is surrounded by only his closest friends, the situation remains the same; he is eating with sinners.

A Knife in the Back: The Act of Betrayal (Mark 14:42–45)

Picking up the context here is crucial for appreciating Mark's literary abilities. Judas betrays Jesus in 14:44, 45. Jesus' own words in v. 42 are short, dramatic, and filled with movement. "Get up! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer." What is profound is that, just as in 14:18–21, Jesus does not name the man directly. In fact, in v. 42 Jesus refers to him as "my betrayer." It is not that Judas has betrayed a cause, a movement, or a program. Judas has betrayed Jesus himself. Through the voice of Jesus, the narrator makes this point with dramatic force.

The narrator then shifts attention away from Jesus and onto the Betrayer to whom Jesus referred. However, Mark does something significant—he refers to Judas as "one of the Twelve" again. This man, approaching Jesus, leading a crowd of armed men to capture and kill Jesus, is one of the Twelve! Mark will not allow his audience to forget that this man, this evil, self-serving Betrayer, is one of the selected few who lived in community and relationship with Jesus. This man, who enabled the Pharisees, Elders, and Chief Priests to implement their evil plan, was hand-selected by Jesus and given privileged position and authority.

The proverbial knife in the back has not yet been thrust. In v. 44, Judas (now again referred to as "the Betrayer") comes and commits an act that typifies his character and presentation in the book of Mark. He greets Jesus with a title of respect ("Rabbi") and kisses him as a sign of identification.²⁸ For a disciple to kiss his teacher was a common form of greeting and respect in the first century. It is noteworthy that the word used for "kiss" in v. 44 is *phileō* (φιλέω). Only here, and in the parallel passages of

28. The "treacherous kiss" has a background in the Old Testament (Marcus, *Mark 8–16*, 991; Collins, *Mark*, 684–85).

Matthew and Luke, is φιλέω used in this way. Typically, this word is understood as “to love” or “to have affection.”²⁹ It is striking, then, that this word is used in reference to Judas’s kiss. The identification of the one who is to be captured by the armed mob is done with an act loaded with significance, symbolic of love and affection. The irony of the use of this word heightens the tragic nature of the event.

Two other points, when referring to this passage, are worth noting and both have to do with dialogue. The only instance where Jesus directly refers to Judas in Mark, he calls him “my betrayer” (14:42). As far as the reader is concerned, this is the sum of Jesus’ interaction with Judas and characterizes nearly his entire relationship with him. The only instance in Mark where Judas directly speaks to Jesus, he calls him “Rabbi” (14:45), a title of respect and honor, while simultaneously singling him out for capture. This, again, exemplifies his entire relationship with Jesus.

Jesus predicts, in the upper room, not only that Judas will betray him, but that *all* the disciples will desert him (14:27). As Meyers notes, “The story of the community’s last days together is thus defined by the twin themes of conspiracy and betrayal.”³⁰ The denial by Peter stings the reader nearly as badly as the betrayal by Judas. Judas we have known from the beginning as the Betrayer (3:19). Peter, however, is the spokesman for the Twelve, and his denial surprises the reader.³¹ After all that readers have seen of Peter, they likely respond with equaled fervency, “Even if all fall away, certainly Peter will remain faithful?” Yet despite the similarities between the actions of Judas and Peter, their ends could not be more different. Peter, after denying Jesus and coming to his senses, goes out and weeps (14:72). Later, at the empty tomb, he is singled out by the angel for a message that indicates a future with Jesus (16:7). It seems

29. See Stählin, φιλέω, 114; Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 25:33.

30. Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 355.

31. The significance of Peter in Mark’s Gospel is summarized and presented by Black, *Disciples*, 42. Peter’s role as a leader and spokesman for the group is beyond dispute.

that in some sense or another, Peter is restored. Judas's actions after his betrayal, however, remain hidden in the Gospel of Mark. Mark's Judas does not return the silver, nor does he commit suicide. Mark's Judas is simply not heard from again. The last word spoken by Judas in the Gospel of Mark is "Rabbi." This word, understood in the context of the scene of 14:43–51, encapsulates Judas's relationship with Jesus entirely. A term of respect is a cloak for selfish ambition and betrayal. Jesus, in the Upper Room, said about Judas: "it would be better for him not to have been born." This is, in fact, in some sense, Judas's actual end in Mark. He is not heard from again; he fades away into obscurity, and the narrative continues. His absence is hardly noticed; it is as if he was never born.³²

Jesus and Judas—A Story of Contrast

More than simply portraying Judas as a villain, the Gospel of Mark portrays him as Jesus' foil and opposite. Jesus is held up as illustrative of one who is on God's page, and Judas, as being on the "other" page. To summarize, I offer a few ways in which Mark contrasts the character of Judas and the character of Jesus. First, a contrast is made through the use of titles. Whereas Jesus is: Son of God (1:1), Son of Man (2:10), Son of David (10:47), Rabbi (9:5), and Good teacher (10:17), Judas is simply "the Betrayer" (3:42). Second, their respective missions or motivations are contrasted. Jesus is seen to be healing (5:1–43; 8:31–37), teaching (1:22, 27, 38, 39; 2:6), feeding the hungry (6:30–44; 8:1–13), and serving and giving (10:45). The only mission, focus or inner motivation the reader of Mark's Gospel is given about Judas is that he is "seeking" to betray Jesus (14:11). Third, Mark contrasts the two characters by way of their actions. Jesus,

32. Compare this with the Jesus' words about the unnamed woman who anoints him. The act of kindness and humility by this woman will continue to be remembered, or, "talked about" in the whole world (14:9), but the oral tradition and early church kerygma notwithstanding (see note 1 above), the Gospel of Mark, as a self-contained literary work, does not mention Judas again. He has disappeared from the Gospel of Mark. (This is a literary comment and not a historical one.)

in the Upper Room, offers his body and blood as the means of the New Covenant (14:22–24). Judas, enjoying that intimate scene with Jesus, is not concerned with the New Covenant, but with the financial gain of betrayal (14:11). Fourth, the manner in which divine pronouncements factor into the story relating to these two individuals serves as a source of contrast. Jesus is the one about whom God declares: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased” (1:11; cf. 9:7). Jesus (God’s agent) calls a curse on Judas when he declares: “It would be better for him if he had not been born” (14:21).

This last point is worth additional attention, for it presents the final outcome of discipleship in Mark’s Gospel. Following Jesus—the one on God’s mission—in faith and repentance (1:15), results in experiencing the Kingdom of God (9:1; 10:23, 27–31; 14:24–25) and resurrection (see “life” in 8:35). Abandoning true discipleship, according to Mark, leads one to end up in the same fashion as Judas—better to have never been born (14:21). One may struggle and stumble as Peter does, yet hope remains (16:7), but for the one who betrays his Lord and Master, Jesus’ words remain: “woe to that man” (14:21).

Conclusion

The manner in which Judas is characterized in the Gospel of Mark relies on contrast, repetition, and irony. Mark presents a consistently negative image of the man and does so with nuance. For the most part, a quick reading of the Gospel of Mark accomplishes its point regarding Judas: he is understood to be, in the most basic sense, the antagonist to Jesus. It is not, however, until readers slow their pace that the literary ability of the author of Mark is appreciated for its strength. Most narrative-critical work in the Gospels has treated the disciples as a group, with Judas as an outlier. This article demonstrates that attention should be given to all characters such as Judas, who play a somewhat minor role. When this is done, the characterization of Judas in the Gospel of Mark can be seen to be direct and focused. Judas is portrayed as a “flat” character that exhibits nothing approaching virtue. He is “the Betrayer” from beginning to end.

Additionally, by noting the manner in which Jesus and Judas are set at odds and contrasted, modern readers gain a clearer picture of the type of discipleship that God desires. Jesus is walking in harmony with God's mission, while Judas opposes it. Disciples of Jesus follow their Master's lead in offering selfless love to those around them. Jesus "did not come to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom" (10:45). Those who pursue dishonest gain through selfish means are not following God's agenda, because, like Judas, they are pursuing the world (8:34–38). At its core, discipleship in Mark is about relationship, not social standing or ethnic privilege. Jesus pursues and welcomes those marginalized by society and invites them to follow him: the lepers (1:40–45), the lame and paralyzed (2:1–12), "sinners" and tax collectors (2:13–17), the unclean (5:27–29), the mute (7:31–37), and blind (8:22–26). According to Jesus, those who protect their life will lose it (8:34–38). The kingdom of God that Jesus inaugurates is not for the rich (10:17–23) or privileged (10:43). One can be close to Jesus, yet still lack a life-giving relationship, as is the case with Judas. The leader must become the servant (10:43–45). Those like Judas, who are close to the Messiah, are not guaranteed acceptance. Judas represents the irony of discipleship in Mark. He starts off as one of "the Twelve," as one who was specially chosen and selected by Jesus, but because of his actions and failure to remain loyal to Jesus, he ends up on the outside. He becomes "that man" (14:21), the "Betrayer." The paradox of discipleship is that those on the "outside" can be welcomed "inside," and that those privileged to be "inside" are not guaranteed acceptance by virtue of their initial proximity to the Messiah.

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