

Gehazi and Judas

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MORALLY EVIL ACTS begin with our desires. Desires in themselves are not necessarily evil. However, when by our desires we are drawn away and enticed to the point where they lead us to disobey God's moral code, then we sin. Desires are not the only culprit, for will, reason and emotion also enter into the process. But James says that individual acts of sin ultimately stem from desires that go astray (Jas. 1:13-15).

Thus an individual has certain basic desires that are not evil in themselves. The person initially may not intend to satisfy those desires in a way that disobeys God's moral code. However, a desirable object comes before him, and he is attracted to it. He forms the intention to have it, even though acquiring it is prohibited by moral precept. Then, when allurements become strong enough, he wills to acquire the thing he intends to have.

Next, action to carry out the decision occurs. Once the action is performed, the moral law has been broken. Some of the conditions surrounding the decision may involve God bringing about the state of affairs in which the decision is made. However, temptation to do wrong, and the actual willing of it, stem, not from God, but from the person. God created us with the capacity to act, but He neither creates our actions nor performs them.

Gehazi and Judas Iscariot

I would like now to look at how these principles applied to two men who lived centuries apart: Gehazi, the pupil of Elisha, and Judas Iscariot, the pupil of Jesus. Both were in close association with their teachers on a daily basis, yet they failed. The cause was a desire for material gain (greed). Both succumbed to the temptation to fulfil that desire, preferring the riches of the world to the riches of the spirit.

How could Gehazi and Judas, privileged to be in close association with such great teachers, succumb so easily to temptation? They failed to realise the importance of the position in which they were placed, to carry on the work of the Lord after their teachers died. The spirit that was on Elijah was passed on to Elisha and pre-

sumably would have been passed on to Gehazi in due course; and the spirit empowered Jesus's pupils to preach the gospel of the Kingdom after his death. Both Gehazi and Judas had great potential, but they obviously were not sons of God.

Gehazi

Gehazi first appears in Scripture in 2 Kings 4. A wealthy woman lived in Shunem, and, whenever Elisha passed by, she would urge him to stop for refreshment. Perceiving him to be a holy man of God, she prepared for him a small room equipped with a bed, table, chair and lampstand.

Elisha sought to reward her for her kindness, but how? She was wealthy, relatively content, and among her own people. It was at this point that Gehazi showed his potential, for he perceived the thing that was lacking in her life—an heir. He said: "Well, she has no son and her husband is old" (v. 14, NIV). Elisha prophesied that she would bear a child, and within a year she bore a son.

When the child had grown, he died. Leaving the dead child upon Elisha's bed in the upper room, the woman went in great distress to the prophet. On receiving the tragic news, Elisha sent Gehazi ahead in haste with instructions to lay his staff on the child's face. On arrival, Gehazi laid the staff on the child's face according to Elisha's instructions.

There was no response, either sound or hearing. If laying the staff on the child's face was to be instrumental in its revival, was the lack of response due to lack of faith? "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good" (Lk. 6:45). What was in Gehazi's heart? We are made aware in the next chapter that Gehazi's heart lay elsewhere.

Where do our hearts lie? Jesus warned us that material things are a great temptation. "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Mt. 6:21). The rich farmer in Luke 12 thought he had it made. He said to himself: "Life! thou hast an Abundance of Good things laid up for many Years; rest, eat, drink, and enjoy thyself". But God said: "Foolish man! This NIGHT they will demand thy LIFE from thee; and who then will possess what thou hast provided?". The lesson

Christ draws is: "Thus is HE who AMASSES TREASURE for himself, and is not rich with respect to God" (vv. 19-21, Diaglott).

Now enter Naaman the Syrian. Exhorted by the faith of a captive Israelite maiden, he came to Elisha carrying great wealth: ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of garments (2 Kgs. 5:5). This offering was commensurate with Naaman's high expectation of a cure for his leprosy, and was a temptation of major proportions. Elisha had no problems with it; he was rich in spirit, and refused Naaman's offering outright.

However, the temptation proved too much for Gehazi. Concocting a lie, he pursued the now cured Naaman and received a talent of silver and two changes of garments. Admittedly, he received less than Naaman had brought with him, but by his action he also devalued what Elisha had done for Naaman. Gehazi was caught in his own craftiness, and received Naaman's leprosy as punishment for his folly.

Judas Iscariot

Turning now to Judas Iscariot, never has a New Testament personality been held in such contempt as Judas Iscariot, the man described by Jesus as "the son of perdition" (Jno. 17:12), apparently writing him off as being unredeemable. John 12:6 informs us that he had no compassion on the poor, was a thief, had the alms box, and stole the money that was deposited in it. Indeed, the description painted of Judas leaves little room for anything other than loathing, for he was instrumental in causing Jesus to suffer a humiliating and painful death.

However, there is Scriptural evidence to show that the love Jesus engendered in his disciples was not totally foreign to Judas. How could it be? We would expect the personality of Jesus to have had some effect on him, as a close pupil. Jesus was aware of a serious aberration in Judas's character, yet he allowed him to continue in fellowship. Having seen the miracles performed by Jesus, Judas, like most others, recognized that the power he exhibited could only have come directly from God. Having been present with Jesus during many heated exchanges with the scribes and Pharisees, in which Jesus made complete fools of them, Judas was also aware that they wanted to kill him.

It is not too difficult to see how a cunning mind like Judas's, having noted these things, could conceive a plan that would do our modern-day con-men proud. For an agreed price he could assist the authorities to seize Jesus. This would place the teacher in no danger, for the providential hand that had kept him safe would not desert him. Even if it did, with his miraculous power Jesus would have absolutely no problem freeing himself. Judas would have the money, and it would not be his fault if the authorities could not hold Jesus.

Having brought his plan to fruition, and having received his reward, something happened that Judas never expected. Jesus did not free himself. In fact, as Judas saw the suffering that Jesus began to endure at the hands of his enemies, the uncompassionate heart we read about in John 12:6 actually repented: "Then THAT Judas who DELIVERED him up, perceiving That he was condemned, repented; and returned the THIRTY Shekels to the HIGH-PRIESTS and the ELDERS, saying, 'I have sinned in betraying innocent Blood'" (Mt. 27:3,4, Diaglott).

Jesus's character had indeed touched the heart of this cold, conniving person, but it was to no avail. From the picture painted of Judas we may wonder why he could not have passed off Jesus's suffering and death with the same lack of feeling as did those who sought it. "What is that to us?", they said (v. 4). Such was the burden of guilt and grief that he could not bear to live with it. The money was no consolation. Hurling it down in the temple, he withdrew, and, having gone away, hanged himself.

The Scripture indicates that without repentance there can be no forgiveness. But Judas confessed his remorse to the wrong people. Also, we read in the Scriptures that in one notable instance repentance was sought with tears, but with little effect. We are informed in Hebrews 12 that Esau was a profane person, and sold his birthright for one meal. Afterward, when he wished to inherit the blessing, "he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears" (vv. 17,18).

Judas sold his place beside Jesus for thirty pieces of silver, and, like Esau, found no place for a change of mind, though he showed great remorse. Like Gehazi, Judas was caught in his own craftiness, and suffered the consequences.