

THE DOCTRINE OF REVEALING

JOHN 14.22-26—

²² Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, "But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?"

²³ Jesus replied, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. ²⁴ Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.

²⁵ "All this I have spoken while still with you. ²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you."

Not "Whosoever"?

Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, "But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?"

"For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man."

JOHN 5.21, 27

"This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them."

JOHN 6.65

Who gets to know Jesus and how does one come to believe in him? Is it a "free will" choice or by divine selection? Is it really "whosoever" or only some who are specifically chosen and called? While Jesus seems to reiterate truths which he has previously said, this question of Judas frames the response of Jesus in a way that requires us to consider this critical matter of "how does one know?".

The Quandary of Sovereignty

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!

“Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?”

ROMANS 11.33-34

When we begin to explain the sovereignty of God, our explanations quickly become inadequate and contradictory. Is God sovereignly involved in all that happens to me? Does He choose to let something bad happen to me—as well as to an unbeliever? If I am blessed, did He choose to bless me? Does God also choose to bless unbelievers? Did He ordain my salvation but not that of my neighbor?

The first thing that we must acknowledge, on the authority of Scripture, is that we can never fully understand or explain the sovereignty of God—the infinite simply cannot be explained by the finite.

In our study of this passage, we are specifically concerned with the issue raised by Judas of who gets to know Jesus: *“But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?”* At one end of the theological spectrum is the belief that **God** has predetermined those who will be saved (predestination and election); at the other end is the belief that an **individual** chooses in faith to believe in Christ as Savior and Lord and is saved (free grace/free will).

In Scripture we find a combination of factors within the *revelation-salvation equation*:

- ▶ the gift of faith (Ephesians 2.8-9),
- ▶ the convicting/revealing work of the Holy Spirit (John 16.8-11; 1 Corinthians 12.3),
- ▶ the proclamation of the gospel (1 Corinthians 1.21; 15.1-2),
- ▶ and the believing of the individual (John 3.18).

Ephesians 2.8-9—

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”

John 16.8-11—

When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because people do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

1 Corinthians 12.31—

Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus be cursed,” and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 1.21—

For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.

1 Corinthians 15.1-2—

Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

John 3.18—

Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.

At the end of his public ministry, Jesus exhorted his hearers,

“Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light.” (12.36)

John went on to say that *“they still would not believe in him”* (12.37) and then quoted from Isaiah’s prophecy to explain that they *“could not believe”* because—

“He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn—and I would heal them” (12.37-40; quoting from Isaiah 53.1; 6.10).

So was it their choice to believe or God’s determination that they could not believe?

In his letter to the church in Rome, the Apostle Paul wrote of “God’s purpose in election” (9.11) in determining to whom He would show mercy, but then subsequently wrote: *That if you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved* (10.9-10).

So is it “whosoever” or isn’t it? Does He determine who can believe and who will be saved, who will be “*an object of his wrath—prepared for destruction*” (Romans 9.22), and who will be “*the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for his glory—even us, whom he also called*” (Romans 9.23-24)? After his salvation statement (Romans 10.9-10), the Apostle Paul continued writing about this dynamic of revelation and belief—

For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, ¹³ for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” ¹⁴ How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? ¹⁵ And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written:

“How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

¹⁶ *But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our message?” ¹⁷ Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.*

¹⁸ *But I ask: Did they not hear? Of course they did:*

“Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.”

¹⁹ *Again I ask: Did Israel not understand? First, Moses says,*

“I will make you envious by those who are not a nation;

I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding.”

²⁰ *And Isaiah boldly says,*

“I was found by those who did not seek me;

I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me.”

²¹ *But concerning Israel he says,*

“All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people.”

ROMANS 10.12-21

So where does this leave us? After all, I believe that I am saved so does the question that Judas asked even matter? In fact it must, if the answer of Jesus is going to matter.

The Conclusion of the Matter

Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.

ECCLESIASTES 12.13-14

When it comes to the question of God's sovereignty and who gets to know Jesus, it is not a matter of what we *don't* know, but a matter of what we *do* know; and it's not only a matter of what we know, but what we *do* with what we know—

Jesus replied, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me."

It may not be clear to us why some are privileged to hear the gospel while others die without having heard; we may not be able to resolve the sense of contradiction between the mercy of God and His judgment for those without any opportunity to believe. These issues are not within our purview. What must be of concern to us is—

- ▶ That I understand that God has taken the initiative for my salvation and therefore I am utterly dependent on His mercy.
- ▶ That I understand that my faith is based on Christ's merit and apart from his worth (righteousness), I am utterly worthless.
- ▶ That I understand that I have believed, not because I possess faith, but because someone else spoke the Word to me and the Word produced faith in my heart.
- ▶ That I understand that because I *do know* the good news, much more will be required of me than those who do not.
- ▶ That I understand that the living proof of my love for Christ is my obedience to his commands: *"My command is this: Love one another as I have loved you."* (15.12)